

ANOTHER SCANDAL

COSMO HAMILTON

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By Cosmo Hamilton

THE BLUE ROOM
SCANDAL
WHO CARES?
HIS FRIEND AND HIS WIFE
THE SINS OF THE CHILDREN
THE BLINDNESS OF VIRTUE
THE MIRACLE OF LOVE
THE RUSTLE OF SILK
THE DOOR THAT HAS NO KEY
ANOTHER SCANDAL

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BY
COSMO HAMILTON



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PART I

I

APRIL had come over the hill.

And when Franklin crossed the road from the golf course, vaulted the low wall of his garden, and went up the path that was lined with regiments of crocuses, he might have seen many changes made by long soft hours of sun and new born hope.

But he was in no mood for these things. All he saw was the picture that he had carried in his mind all day and for many days, and which had flung him into tortures of anxiety, being a man who knew nothing of women.

Lying in one cane chair with her feet on another, an unread book in her lap, and a new light in her eyes, was the girl whom he loved beyond the interpretation of words, and was in terror about because she was going to have a baby.

Of all girls this one, sitting still, in deliberate loneliness, with her feet on a chair, her face turned up to an early star, and a smile on her lips that he had never seen before. Of all girls this one, whose young, slim beauty had enchanted his heart, whose restless energy had been sufficient to turn a mill and drive the

engines of a ship, devise a hundred forms of daredeviltry, and bring a horse home quivering with fatigue. Of all girls, Beatrix, sitting alone, with her eyes on a star, and that smile on her lips . . . and her feet on a chair.

She turned, sensing him and his love, and waved her hand. And with a sort of stumble, he went up, and knelt at her side with his head in her lap. "Oh God," he said, knowing nothing of women, "What have I done to you? What brutes men are."

And she put her lips to his hair and laughed.

He had forced himself to play golf all day, — that day when not in tears but laughing, April had come over the hill. He had played thirty-six holes with the grim concentration apparently of the born golfer, — they are hardly ever made, — but in reality of the man in a futile effort to escape from the nagging of self-reproach. All spring had danced across the course, and winter, limping in the hollow places, had been driven out of sight. The fickle procession had come up to the music of soft winds, broken into gay disorder, and put the spirit of youth in everything. With fear in his soul, knowing nothing of women, he had missed it all, and set a pace to the game which had brought the others of the foursome to the end of the day with relief. All day long he had raced from green to green, — jaw set, a deep line between his eyes, and a sort of anger that found no relief in beating the ball, — Pelham Franklin, that hearty, good-natured fellow, with that short infectious laugh, and all the luck in the world.

At the sixth hole of the first round, the short hole, on a green balanced neatly at the edge of a brook, old woods to right and left, the meeting place of rabbits before the sun had drunk the dew, Amery had touched young Doubleday on the arm, and spoken behind his hand. "What's the trouble? Row with the wife do you suppose, or a bad money loss? One or the other, must be."

"Must be. Something lashing him even harder than he's lashing the ball. D'you think he's told anything to Hutchinson?"

"My dear chap, he doesn't tell. Gets a thing on his chest and it sticks. You couldn't get a word out of Franklin with a corkscrew."

"Well, we're in for a strenuous day. Probably we shall hole out the last putt on our knees in the dark, and totter home for a rest cure."

But the game had been brought to an end before the light had failed. Amery, Doubleday, and Hutchinson, bachelors, and not particularly gifted with imagination, had driven away together, leaving Franklin in the middle of the deserted dressing room, cursing the missing shoehorn. He had refused a lift, and, with inexhaustible energy, was going to walk home across the course. The garden of his cottage was only a stone's throw from the fourteenth green, the private road intervening.

The sun had gone, but there were streaks of faint colors in the sky. Four children were playing on a tennis court, and their young high voices vied with the screaming of swifts that zigzagged about the club house. A lonely and heroic member was driving ball after ball down into the long smooth dip of the first hole in the forlorn endeavor of curing a slice, — and

as Franklin started to walk home over grass that still had its spongy places, he paused to speculate. "What the deuce is wrong with P. F.? He's been looking like that for weeks. Of all men alive he has nothing to worry about, — money to burn, no factories to break into a strike, the health of an ox, and that girl for a wife. . . . Now then, you. Eye on the ball, wrist well over, head well down. . . ."

The smell of cut grass in the air once more, the voice of a bird in the woods again, the face of one star high up in the sky . . . and she put her lips to his hair and laughed.

But was there anything to laugh at in this?

Here was a man who had been married for eighteen untranslatable months; a devoted lover, — even perhaps too devoted because he was willing to sacrifice common sense at any moment and hand all his cherished illusions on a plate to his wife if she as much as hinted at her need of them for a moment's amusement; who knew so little of women and had spent so much of his time away from the beaten track with men, that he was now agonized with sympathetic fear at what was to his wife, although young and without experience, a perfectly natural event. Here was that rather rare person a born husband, — most men becoming husbands by accident, and remaining accidental. A good sportsman, he said what he meant and stuck to it. He had no complexes; nothing of the artistic temperament which makes the marriage contract a scrap of paper because it is another term for the complete inability to conform to the rules of any honest game. He was as clear and open as running water, able rather than merely clever, as loyal as a dog, and just as grateful for small mercies; curiously

without conceit except for his ability to make trout flies; hot tempered, and in no sense of the word a pacifist. He had none of the hypocrisy of those cowards who, upon receiving a smack in the face, turn the other cheek in order to make their opponents ashamed to hit again. When hit he hit back, straight from the shoulder and above the belt. He was elemental, like a boy, and had no affectations of sophistication or cynicism. He was as far away from that futile group that goes by the name of intelligentsia as a salmon from an artificial pool. And deep down in his soul, though wholly unknown to himself, there was a groping spirituality that sent him out of civilization into nature, out of ugliness into the beauty of the by-paths and the sea.

His young wife, the Vanderdyke girl as she was still sometimes called, whose escapades before her marriage were even now remembered by people whose memories were not among the things they particularly cultivated, and whose autocracy as the only daughter of one of the excessively rich men of America had earned a million paragraphs in the obsequious columns of the newspapers, knew all these things in Franklin, and loved him for them. And when she found herself gradually and gradually less able to carry on her old routine, her sweepingly individualistic habits of life, because of the wonderful thing which had made her undergo a complete volteface, and filled her with a sense of pride and responsibility, the attitude of this man seemed perfectly natural too. It was all part and parcel of his idealism and his ignorance, his chivalry and his adoration, his belief in woman as a delicate thing to be treated with exquisite care and tenderness, — a mystery and a miracle almost. It pleased her

awfully, and did something to her vanity that was very warming. It hurt her a little, too, because she could see that, as time went on, he began to look at her with a sort of surprise and bewilderment which made her feel as though she were a stranger, — as though she had altered herself as women do when they fall victim to a new fashion, and bob their hair, or have their eyebrows moved. Often she told herself, sitting alone after her regular routine of exercise, thinking forward, building dreams, keenly and amazingly aware of being the bearer of new life, thinking back to her former self with astonishment, and waiting with courage for the future, that she had not deserved the deep, strong, deathless love of the man at her feet. And when she laughed it was not to deride his agony of mind, the suffering that gave him bad nights and hours of self-reproach which were the completest proofs of the sort of tenderness and fright that lift marriage to its greatest height; but in the hope of putting confidence where there was no confidence, of making light of a thing that was not light, of rendering commonplace an event that was one of the wonders of the world. But how could she say all this? What could she do to soothe and justify and explain when he refused to do more than let her see the jangle of his brain by the look in his eyes and a sudden blurting of words immediately arrested? She must be twice a mother, she told herself, in this time of twofold responsibility, and give to her husband now all the kindness that she must presently give to his child; encourage him to keep as much as possible out of the sight of her, and send him out to work off the effects of imagination by playing golf in the companionship of men.

April having come over the hill that day they stayed on in the waning light. But he had nothing more to say about the state of his feelings. It wasn't fair. In fact he set himself as usual to rub out the effect of his brief uncontrol by playing the ultra-normal man. His voice was good and his manner was excellent, but he forgot about his eyes. "We had a pretty hard game," he said. "Course in fair condition. They all turned up, — Hutchinson, Amery, and Doubleday."

There was something crawling down her neck and she wanted to take one of her hands away. But he held them tight, and it didn't much matter. "Who was your partner, — Amery in a new tie?"

"No, Hutchinson, and I wish it had been you. We went round twice. I don't know how the game came out."

"You don't know!"

"No. I wasn't looking."

Another star, and another, and another. On the light breeze the faint suggestion of lilac, and in his eyes — what? Pride? No, but wait. Jealousy? Yes, already. Fright again? Always. . . . Oh, why didn't he let himself go for once, and get rid of all the stored-up emotion that made him like an unexploded bomb. Poor dear old Pel! It was almost dark, and in a few minutes it would be difficult to see his face and eyes. But she stayed out to give him the chance to confess and confide, so that she might comfort and control. She felt astonishingly firm and matronly.

"That wasn't much like you," she said, throwing a line.

"I don't feel much like me," he answered, catching it, but letting it go at once. "It's the weather I suppose, or something. Anyway, it doesn't matter." It

wasn't fair to worry her with his anxieties; it wasn't fair when he had brought her to a pass like this, and made her sit all day, alone and quiet, with her feet on a chair. . . . Of all girls, — Beatrix! What brutes men are.

And so she went off at a tangent for a moment. "The course is looking awfully well already," she said.

"How on earth do you know that?"

"My dear, good Pel, I'm not an invalid. I'm perfectly well and strong, and when I think there's nobody looking, I stump all over the course every day. I'm only going to have a baby, you know."

Only going to have a baby! "But, — are you sure you ought to do that now? I shall change doctors if Mallett can't take the trouble to look after you. Laugh then, but this is frightfully serious, and if I had my way I wouldn't allow you to walk a yard. Bee, for God's sake take care of yourself."

She finished her laugh and kissed him. Were all men made cowards by the women they loved? And was it because they played so small a part in this deed of bearing life that they felt obliged to develop so huge and delightful an egotism in support of self-respect? They did everything else so much better than women. This was really a tremendous blow to their vanity. And yet, in a final analysis, how many of them would undertake the whole responsibility so that they might capture all the credit?

"I *am* taking care of myself, dear old boy," she said. "And you're taking care of me too. But I've got to get exercise, you know, and carry on normally. So please don't go and glare at Dr. Mallett and threaten to break his neck. For one thing he's smaller

than you are, and for another he knows his job. Don't worry, Pel." Perhaps the fact that she took it for granted that he was worrying would open a small hole in his stubborn fourth wall?

But no. This was a conspiracy of unselfishness. Both these young people who stood at the first great crisis of love were determined to hide the true state of their feelings behind a barricade of reserve until one of them broke down. "Oh, I'm not worrying," he said. "Not an atom. Oh, Lord no. As you say, what is there to worry about? You're only going to have a baby. That's easy enough." He would not, in spite of all temptation, be a bigger brute than ever by inflicting her with his fright, — amazing as it was to find her unafraid. The thing to do was to take it as light-heartedly as she did, — a matter of very little importance. But as he put her hand to his lips he contradicted this effort at an attitude by the vibration of his anxiety.

And so it went on. Not all her shrewdness and sudden tangents, not all her cunning charm and seductive flashes of smile, not even the light caress of her fingers could draw him out. He loved her too well. He made conversation. He talked commonplaces. He refused the chance. And so at last she asked him to help her up. They were dining at eight, and must go in and dress. That night, when they were alone again, she would exert herself again to make him speak so that she might let him see that he was not a brute even if he had metaphorically put her feet on a chair, and anchored her energy to a porch, but what he had done was what she had needed, both of him and of life.

II

IT was to be one of those family affairs which Franklin always dreaded; a monthly dinner at which precisely the same things were said at almost precisely the same moments by the parents and the nearest relations of his young and amazingly different wife, a girl who bore, Heaven was to be thanked, no remote resemblance to any of them. Mr. Vanderdyke, more than ever like a caricature by Max Beerbohm of a limp and over-leisured member of the House of Lords who had collected everything under the sun in order to give himself a series of false occupations and was now waiting himself to be collected into a future as to which he had been totally unable to make up his mind; Mrs. Vanderdyke, that earnest worker against encroaching age, tightened up by every known astringent, and poured into one of those dresses that can only be worn by a woman whose mind has conquered matter; Aunt Honoria Vanderdyke, honest, simple, and downright, with her hair white, and her fine, strong face as unmade-up as that of a French peasant; Uncle Barnet Thatcher, an amiable terrier who barked from time to time, and wagged his little tail, looked roguish, and drank too much, becoming portentously solemn about nothing, taking every opportunity even when nobody was listening to him of predicting new catastrophes in a now totally unastonished world, and shaking his head when he mentioned the names of any of the political leaders who continued without any power of

interference to go from one deplorable muddle to another.

At the best of times Franklin did not look forward to these affairs. Under the existing circumstances, when his nerves were all flying about like screaming swallows, they filled him with irritation that bordered on blasphemy. He knew that Major Thatcher would immediately pull him aside and ask him with a mixture of mystery and roguishness, "How is she?" as if she ought not to be like that at all. He knew that Mr. Vanderdyke would stand aloof like a disembodied spirit, draw his fingers through his melancholy moustache, and eye him with a sort of mild resentment which would make him want to say, "But, my dear Sir, you quite forget that I have married your daughter." As for Mrs. Vanderdyke, dominated by her chin line, she would once again adopt the silly half-smile of the woman who asks everybody to remark that she will soon be numbered among the freaks of the world by becoming a grandmother, — "I, who do not look a day older than dear Bee's elder sister, — a grandmother! Isn't it too deliciously absurd!" And this, of course, would make Franklin frightfully keen to do something unkind and even cruel, — hand her a looking glass, for instance, tilt up a lamp shade and say, "Can't you see that you look older than the Sphinx?"

In the days after the return from the honeymoon, when Beatrix was just as she had been before he had married her, these family affairs were rather amusing. They had reminded Franklin of the little dinners of the smaller royalties whom he had met before the war at such places as Biarritz, of people who knew each other far too intimately, and spent the greater part of their lives in far too close juxtaposition so that they

anticipated each other's remarks, and made no effort to disguise boredom and that note of family contempt which vibrates through all the minor castles of Europe.

He thanked God that this would be the last ordeal before Bee, — and drew up at the thought which stirred him once again to the old dogging fear, and made him ask himself for the thousandth time, "If she doesn't . . . Oh, God, she doesn't get through . . . ?"

Everything happened in exactly the right order. The enormous car, devoid of all embellishments so that it looked self-consciously plain, arrived with utter punctuality. Mr. Vanderdyke had brought about this quite unnecessary feat by having goaded the members of his small party until they wished that some act of God or perfectly natural phenomenon would cause his death. He had gone up and down the passages of his pompous house like the call boy of a theatre, crying the time. The Major, who had never been in the Army, and being a bachelor had cut his time according to his own wishes, had very nearly been driven into a statement of his feelings, which would have put an end to long periods of great luxury at no cost to himself. Whenever the warning voice of his host and brother-in-law had made itself heard, accompanied by the pattering of his fingers on the door, something had happened. He had nicked himself with his safety razor, — always a simple thing to do. He had become red in the face and apoplectic because neither he nor his valet could jam a recalcitrant stud into the underneath hole of an over-starched shirt. A shoelace had snapped at the very moment when the car rolled round

to the front of the house. "Oh, my God!" he had cried finally, putting his noticeably little foot on the knee of his valet, "What a hell of a lot of time these punctual people waste." And he had sighed deeply for the peace and quiet of his bachelor apartment on East 39th Street among the old brownstone houses of Murray Hill. Having the delightful gift of resilience his recovery was complete, however, by the time that he leaped jauntily from the car to hand the ladies out with the exaggerated gallantry that he had carried over from a period as dead as the Dodo.

"Charming, charming," said Mrs. Vanderdyke, running her too wide eyes over Franklin's cottage. "So nicely done. A little house is so friendly, don't you think?" Any house was little to her which didn't have thirty-six bedrooms, a ball room and an art gallery.

To which Aunt Honoria, throwing a wink at the Major, added her usual comment, "Perfect for a honeymoon. Before I die I shall hope to see another large wing added for the children."

It was the ritual always repeated on these occasions by these two good ladies who permitted themselves thereupon to be conducted upstairs by a nearly always different maid. The house was at least a mile from the nearest Picture Theatre.

Franklin stalked out to meet Mr. Vanderdyke and the Uncle. Number one and number two remarks duly followed, — the "How is she?" and the parental resentment. It was a ghastly business. The one bright spot about it all was that he had not married the family, that there was no necessity for him to live under the same roof with the people whose daughter he had led to the altar, and that there were at any rate

nice long spaces between these royal visits during which he could call his wife his own, and forget that even she had been forced to come into the world in the usual manner.

In his own room, the only one in the house upon which Beatrix had not laid her decorative hand, Franklin walked up and down like a caged lion while the Major inspected his trophies, and Mr. Vanderdyke wandered from corner to corner looking at nothing. There were at least ten minutes to kill before Mrs. Vanderdyke arrived in the drawing-room with Aunt Honoria and Beatrix, immediately upon which dinner would be announced. And so in order not to have to reply to exactly the same set of questions and remarks Franklin broke into a monologue. "Wonderful weather," he said. "If it goes on like this it won't be long before the greens recover themselves. The Irish are still fighting, I see, — in order probably to prove to the world once more how necessary it was for them to govern themselves. According to to-day's paper, Lloyd George has returned to London after eating the lonely leek. Its juice will give him all the cunning he needs to stick to the Premiership. How about the bonus bill? I should like to be in that England-to-America trip. I am a tremendous believer in the airship."

And so he went on, jumping from subject to subject like a riderless horse at a point-to-point meet, repeating headlines without a break, taking his unwilling listeners from Germany to Japan, from Washington to Westminster, from Poland to Panama, from Petrograd to Wall Street. The effect upon Mr. Vanderdyke was painful. It made him feel like an empty paper bag in an eighty-mile gale. He spun round and

round in the middle of the room like a private game of blindman's buff. The Major was amused though a little annoyed because this rush of words did him out of making his usual jokes about the stuffed wildcat over the mantelpiece and the gargantuan tarpon over one of the bookcases, and the model of the *Galatea* which stood gracefully upon a table. He had cracked these little jokes so often that they had become second nature to him.

Leaving Mrs. Vanderdyke in one of the guest rooms to remove the ravages made by the twelve-mile drive in the hermetically sealed limousine, Aunt Honoria went to the door of Beatrix's room and knocked. She found the girl whom she loved as her own standing a little ruefully in front of the looking-glass, took her warmly into her arms and kissed her.

And Beatrix said: "Yes, not very long to wait now. It's wonderful. I never imagined that there was anything like this in the world. I hardly know myself. Last year at this time . . ."

Aunt Honoria held her tighter. "Last year at this time," she said, "we had hardly recovered from the joy and amazement of your marriage with Pelham, and all the anxiety that you had plunged us into at the last of your escapades. But I knew that this was all you needed to put you on your feet. Tell me about Pelham. He doesn't look well."

And Beatrix gave her aunt a brief description of Pelham's attitude, his anxiety, and his fear. And it was then that Aunt Honoria proved that although she was a spinster, she possessed a keen imagination and

a most observant eye. She said, "My dear, at no other time in a woman's life can she so definitely plumb the depths of her husband's love and character. One of two things invariably happens to a man when his wife is going to have a baby. Either he slips off at a tangent, being dishonest and without loyalty and self-restraint, and has an affair with another woman, or, being loyal, and having something infinitely better than passion, he goes through a crisis of distorted imagination, and gives birth to the child himself. You are lucky that Pelham belongs to the latter type. He's the sort of man who redeems marriage from its absurdity and its selfishness. He is to be encouraged and dealt with very tenderly. He is like all real men and complete husbands. He possesses a strong streak of the woman in him. He won't be well again until the great moment is passed. It won't be much longer now."

"No, not much longer now," said Beatrix, with a catch in her voice.

Then dinner, — old Mr. Vanderdyke eating with his usual suspicion and absolute certainty of punishment; the Mother exercising a most reluctant self-restraint; the Aunt doing herself very well, being without the smallest concern as to what happened to her figure. What a gorgeous state of mind to have achieved. There was, however, one noticeable thing about that evening which made it different from all its predecessors. By her tact, patience, and subtle sense of humor Beatrix proved that she had begun to develop under her subjection to control, the subtle

beauty of which had removed all impatience from her hitherto untrammelled spirit, and made her able to undergo such ordeals as these with calmness and even with pleasure. Although it is perfectly true that a leopard cannot change its spots or the Ethiopian his skin, it does not follow that the leopard may not develop new spots, or the Ethiopian powder his nose. What Aunt Honoria was fond of calling "The Exercise of Motherhood", because probably she had dallied with Freud, had begun to make Beatrix calm, steady, satisfied, and very reasonable, — a new Beatrix, hardly recognizable as she played hostess with a sense of enjoyment which made Franklin almost forget that this was a family affair. She led the Major into the remembrance of his six stock jokes, and then laughed with an air of spontaneity that was masterly. She drew the Mother out on her one or two pet subjects, and then listened to the all too familiar words with affectionate deference. She treated the Father — whom she had never understood, because he had wound himself up in a maze of bewildering tangents — with the sort of kindness that is generally shown to a small boy at a party. He hardly ever opened his mouth, and when he did it was merely to begin a sentence and leave it in mid-air. But in his eyes there was always the same thing which she found impossible not to interpret. "My dear, my dear, my dear. Let it be a boy. We need a boy. The family will run out without a boy." In reply to which, fully realizing her responsibility, Beatrix always did the same thing. She patted the aimless, pale hand, smiled into the wandering eyes, and whispered back, "I'll do my best, Father dear, never fear!"

Many times during that particular evening, under-

lying which, as she could see, there was a far deeper emotion and eagerness than in any of the others, Beatrix was in a sort of way held up by the mental flash of herself as she was before she had met Franklin, — a young autocrat who had only to touch a bell to bring the sun, moon and stars as playthings to her feet, who had gone through life like all the other young things of her kind, with a complete disregard of law and order, supremely individualistic, with all the impudence and effrontery of modern youth, and its overwhelming selfishness. And when she looked back and saw herself in some of the reckless incidents of her pre-marriage period, she found it hard to believe that she was now the pride of her family, the one person in the world to whom they looked to keep their name alive.

Ten o'clock was the hour for the family withdrawal, and so the after dinner hiatus did not last beyond mortal endurance. As usual Mrs. Vanderdyke sat herself at the piano, and played accompaniments to her little series of songs, — short songs, happily, and French. She had a nice, true, thin soprano, and gave herself all the airs of a prima-donna who condescended to sing from time to time in private. It was a fixed idea with her, — as it is with so many women who think that they can sing, and there *are* so many, — that if she had persisted in her training and had not sacrificed herself to her duties, she would have outshone Farrar and driven Mary Garden into a back yard. She had at last grown out of that painful and pathetic period during which everything is subordinated to Voice, and become a retired star, and Oh, the difference to her friends! One good thing resulted from her little orgy of egotism. It did away with the necessity of discovering topics of conversation, and

enabled the others to make themselves perfectly comfortable, shut their eyes, and pass out for a little while. Her voice was no longer one of those which does painful things to eardrums, and sends out vibrations which make even pictures squirm, and old furniture crack.

There were several moments of rather disconcerting emotion before the family drove away. When, for instance, Mrs. Vanderdyke took Beatrix in her arms and kissed her good-night, saying with utter forgetfulness of her chin line, "God bless you, my love. This is the last of our dinners before . . ." and choked a little. And again when the frail, nebulous man held his daughter's hands more tightly than he had ever done, and made one more huge struggle to put into words the appeal and the prayer that had been in his eyes all that evening. And a third when the Major, out in the hall, smacked Franklin on the back with that overdone cordiality that goes with nearly all Majors, especially when they have never been in the Army, and said, "It will soon be over now, my boy. A happy father before we meet again." A perfectly natural, but nevertheless strikingly disconcerting remark, which put Franklin back into terror, and sent a red-hot needle through his solar plexus. Aunt Honoria's one word to Franklin was "Courage", but it was a good word, and he needed it.

It was not until the car had rolled out of hearing, with its two men on the box, and its nose in the air, that Franklin felt at home in his own house once more. "Thank God that's over," he said. "I mean . . ."

"That's exactly what you do mean," said Beatrix laughing. "After all they're my people, so it doesn't matter how frank you are."

He put her hand to his lips. "I tried to behave myself."

"I saw you trying."

"And did I?"

She ran a finger across his small moustache. "Dear old Pel, you always succeed when you try, and sometimes when you don't."

He was grateful for those words of praise but a little touchy, being in a bad state, about the expression of endearment. "Not so infernally old," he said. "Only fifteen years older. Does that begin to seem so much?"

And she laughed again, — laughter being one of the things that he needed most just now. "Fifteen years older? Fiddlesticks! I'm old enough to be your mother. I always was. I was born grown up, like the girl who breaks out of the egg in 'Back to Methuselah.' You know that. What are you now? Thirty-four?"

"Yes," he said. "Thirty-four . . . that is to say I was thirty-five this year."

She waved the whole subject aside with an airy gesture. "Yes, but that isn't what you want to talk to me about. Take the jump, old boy, and get it off your chest." She talked his own language to encourage him. Confession was good for the soul.

He put his arms around her shoulders. He wanted to hold her as he used to do, but remembered. "But I've nothing on my chest, darling, — I mean nothing to worry you about."

"Make up something then," she said. "I've never been worried since I married you. It'll do me good for a change." And she put her lips on the tip of his chin.

“Make up something? That’s easy. Of course I could grouse about this age question, my being thirty-five last month, and all that. I could manufacture a worry and say that I’m really much too old for you, and draw a gruesome picture of myself pottering about with hardening of the arteries and gout in both heels while you’re on the tip of your toes, a young and beautiful thing. And then how about it? I shall be dear old Pel all the time then, the veteran hunter with broken knees, to be given a pat on the nose from time to time, and a bit of sugar.”

Oh, so that had been nagging him, too, in those sleepless hours. “And you could say . . . Go on!” She moved her lips to his lips.

And when he was able to speak he said, “I could tell you something about jealousy if I knew how to say it, — and I don’t. The jealousy that comes from having handed you over to somebody else that you’re going to love much more than me.”

“We’ll see about that,” she said. “Go on. Have another shot at it.” Would he never come up to the jump?

“It’s . . . it’s this,” he said, going sideways still, but edging nearer and nearer, “I’ve spoilt your fun. I’ve put you out of the running, — with your feet on a chair. I can’t get over that. You loathe me for it, you must.”

She kissed him again, and put her ear to his mouth. “Say it, say it,” she whispered. “I want you to, — I want you to.”

And at last he said it, and it wasn’t much, with his face all white, and so strong an emotion that it made him shake from head to foot. “It’s you, — like this. And it’s love. And it’s fear of the pain you’ve got to

go through, and it's terror at the thought of your leaving me here”

But to Beatrix, who saw behind these stammering words, instantly, the shrouded figure that dogged this man, it was a very great deal indeed. So that was it. Death.

“Why don't you laugh at me,” he said, because she didn't speak. “And tell me to shut up, — making an ass of myself like this.”

“Because I don't want you to shut up,” she said, putting her arms around his neck, “I want you to talk like this and be like this. It helps me, Pel, because *I'm* in a wee bit of a funk from time to time, — I don't mind telling you that. But you mustn't let me be. It won't do. It mustn't be allowed. *You* can go on being in a funk. It's only fair that you should divide all this with me, the pain and the joy. Don't bottle it up and keep it away. Don't be afraid of worrying me. Come and tell me often, and the sight of your love will put me on my mettle and give me the pluck I shall need to come through smiling. And I've *got* to come through, Pel, for you, and the family. . . . Did you take a look at father to-night? Did you see what he had in his eyes all the time? ‘A boy, a boy, a boy. Let it be a boy. The family needs a boy.’ . . . I've never done anything for the family yet and this is my chance, do you see? Say damn the family. I shan't mind. Say you haven't married my darned old family. That'd be perfectly true. But Pel, my dear, my dear, I've been a pretty average rotter, and I hurt my people, and I want to make up for it. You saved me once, and through your amazing love you're going to save me again. I shall justify it now. . . . No, wait a minute. I haven't finished yet. Let's

break down fourth walls to-night and indulge in a burst of ego. It'll do us good, and who's to stop us? . . . Two things come to me out there on the porch with my feet on a chair, again and again and again, and the first and the best is this. I love you so much, and so proudly, that all the pain seems nothing, no nothing, to the joy of bringing another you to life. That's what puts the smile on my face. And the other is to do something for father that he's never been able to do for himself, or collect or to buy with all his money, — give birth to a boy who shall belong to the family, and be called after him, and carry on. He'll stop wandering then, come out of his corners, out of his maze, and materialize at last. He was disappointed. I ought to have been a boy. He's never got over that, and I want tremendously, oh tremendously, to see that poor little old man with the pale hands that search for something, give his finger to my baby and have it grasped. . . . Understand that, Pel? But of course you do. You always understand. And I'll wind up this outpouring that's been on my chest as long as the fear has been on yours by telling you this. So listen and never forget, because I may never be able to say it again like this. . . . I love you, my love. I love you as much as you love me, and more. And I respect you, and in addition to loving you I like you and admire you. I do. I do. And I'm going to get through because of that. You're not too old, so stop thinking such rot, and if you imagine that I shall ever pat your nose and give you sugar, you're wrong. I love you, and I shall be grateful and thankful to you and your love for ever and ever and ever."

She stood on tiptoe and kissed him with her heart on her lips. And then she forgot that she had been

born eighteen like the girl in "Back to Methuselah," put her face against his cold white shirt, and cried.

"Oh, God," he said, "Bee!" This was worse than seeing her with her feet on a chair. But all the same, as he stood like a great hulking boy, afraid to hold her too tight, terribly anxious, absurdly and ingenuously afraid, his spirit, like a small and humble replica of himself, went down in supplication and thankfulness at the very feet of God.

And presently, trying to appear as if they were not in the least ashamed of themselves, — and they weren't, — they went upstairs, and there Pelham left Beatrix at the door of her room.

"I feel better," said Beatrix, shutting the door and heaving a sigh.

"Better." The word was echoed by the elderly person who was settled in the deep armchair with a lamp at her elbow as comfortably as a respectable hen in a warm hollow of earth. "My dear, you haven't been feeling ill?"

"Oh, no. Not ill. But vaguely in need of a tonic. And I have just had it, — a big strong dose. It came just at the right moment, and I shall sleep to-night without reading."

Mrs. Lester Keene slanted her head, and pursed her thin lips. "Whose tonic?" she asked with suspicion, having seen no bottle about. She had no use for the advertised medicine and a firm belief only in the individual prescription that is written in bastard Latin after a series of awkward questions by a medical practitioner of pompous appearance and shocking big bills.

She won a laugh for this. One of the reasons for her presence that night was her unconscious gift of winning laughs; the other that if she were not in that house she would be in one of those dull, drab, all-too-well regulated homes for indigent gentlewomen in which there is no such thing as imagination and hardly any humanity. "That's all right, Brownie. Don't worry. I didn't take it out of a bottle or a package, and it isn't in tabloid form. But it was good, and I needed it. What in the world are you doing?"

What in the world should Mrs. Keene be doing under the circumstances but trying her eyes during hours of private ecstasy in the making of dozens of pairs of little socks which no self-respecting baby ever permits upon his feet?

"She will need these," she said with dignity. "And it is the proper thing to do in any case. For pity's sake, let's be proper."

"I'm entirely with you," said Beatrix. "The habit of being proper has grown on me; but it will not be a she."

And for the reason that Mrs. Lester Keene loved Beatrix with a sort of fanaticism, and considered her to be the one beautiful thing on earth, there was an outburst of protest. "No, please," she said. "Please don't joke about this. Afterwards you may have a boy if you like; that would be very nice for the family. But I want your first child to be a girl, — like you. That is something that you owe to the world."

Love again, and egotism!

In the old days, which were not after all so very old, this small brown woman had been engaged as a companion for Beatrix, — which is to say that she

had been paid a salary and provided with a comfortable room so that she might keep an eye on this girl and report anything that might seem to be reportable to Mrs. Vanderdyke or Aunt Honoria. In reality her duties were those of a private detective, and the word companion was in any case a misnomer because there could be nothing in common between Beatrix, bursting with superfluous energy and belonging to a generation totally out of sympathy with everything old, and an elderly woman who had gone through life cheerlessly, and in the narrow, bigoted atmosphere of the English middle-class. Her business in the Vanderdyke house had been just as absurd as if she had been appointed to the presidency of a society for the rescue of fallen women. She would have understood the mental attitude of the average girl of easy virtue as little as that of the only daughter of this fantastically rich family. She had been, of course, less of a companion than a perpetual nuisance and responsibility, comic to this girl of complete sophistication who knew perfectly well what she was behind her camouflage, and exactly when and why she slipped into the presence of her employer to tell her little story. There had been something inescapably pathetic about this poor little lonely soul, whose husband had gone, whose relations could not be bothered, and who clung to life as to a spar in the sea. Her love and loyalty had been proved over and over again, especially during that amazing time when she had stuck to Beatrix and had helped her to escape from the scandal into which she had placed herself with York the portrait painter, and had won the friendship and the affection of this girl. After the marriage there had been no need of Mrs. Keene. Once more she had become a superfluous person, haunted

with the terror of discharge, with little chance of finding a harbor in any other house. She knew nothing. She couldn't cook, having been what is called a lady. She was too old to learn, too middle-class to appeal as a social secretary to the snobbishness of the new-rich. She was merely driftwood, the wreckage of former respectability washed up on the shores of a strange country. And so Beatrix transferred her from servitude to friendship, and she now occupied a place in the Franklin house for reasons of sentiment and charity, — good reasons both. And although she got frequently in the way, and was nearly always a nuisance, everything was done to make her feel that she was valuable and essential. Out of her glorious sense of humor Beatrix invented daily unusefulnesses for this woman to perform, and in the doing of this thing laid, quite unconsciously, a little bunch of flowers at the feet of the Madonna. It may have seemed an easy thing to do, but it was nothing of the sort because there was a certain aggressiveness in Brownie Keene that stirred irritation, and her continual "don'ts" were hard to put up with. Nevertheless, she was safely ensconced in a bedroom and sitting-room in Pelham's cottage, and here she would remain happy, comfortable, and well fed, treated humanly and with affection for the remainder of her days.

Alone, that night, in her charming low-ceilinged bedroom with its old panelling and Colonial four-poster, tall-boys, and dressing tables, its many hooked rugs with their primitive patterns and warm colors,

Beatrix went back over every word and unsaid word of her talk downstairs with Pelham.

Already, then, he was a little jealous of the boy or girl that she was so eager to see, and touch, and wonder at, and adore, and of whose every sleeping move she was so exquisitely aware. Well, that was natural and excellent enough. He resented the fact that she had now to give herself up wholly and entirely to someone else when she was his and he wanted her. He had been forced to stand aside as lover and become husband for the first time. She would have been as jealous and probably grumbled a good deal more if it had been the other way round. She owned to it with that ready laugh of hers, and that fascinating trick, not altogether unconscious perhaps, of fluttering her nostrils. Without jealousy there was no passion and precious little love. And when he said, "What brutes men are" and sentenced himself to the sort of punishment that ruined his peace of mind because he had put her into a backwater "with her feet on a chair," how great a proof he gave of his colossal ignorance of her and of all normal women, who, if this were the act of a brute, loved and respected a brute. That he would continue to worry himself into broken fiddle strings for the rest of the time was certain, and couldn't be helped. If he didn't do this he wouldn't be Pelham. The daily crisis that he must continue to undergo bound him to her more closely and more fairly as a partner in this deed, and was a good training for her in the future management of their baby. Extraordinary how little difference there is between a husband and a child. It would give her something to do while waiting, help her to occupy a mind that was just as lively as ever, because every day she must

say to herself, "Now then, what's to be done with Pelham?" and place him here for the morning and there for the afternoon as a mother does with a boy who is away from his school and his friends. It was good and proper and right and astonishing and beautiful and it opened up wider and wider vistas of the art of life and her own hitherto vaguely imagined responsibilities. . . . Not much more than a year ago she had thought of marriage either as a lark or the means of obtaining her freedom from parental interference. From any other point of view it had seemed to her to be an absurdity. In those days she would have liked to have seen herself promising to obey any man. She would have liked to have put out her finger for a ring that meant any more to her than any old ring, to be lost or given away or left unworn. She had seen something of marriage, in her own home. Some of her friends had gone in for marriage, — elderly children with a sense of curiosity or a spirit of experimentalism. She had stayed with them and had been struck by the ephemeral manner in which it was treated, the indecency of it if it came to that, — two young people who didn't know each other, and didn't want to do so, and who both intended to cut the whole thing at a moment's notice without a single qualm of conscience; divorce, sometimes annulment with a little graft and a dozen mutual lies, and then remarriage to other people. Without having given any serious consideration to the question, — it was not for her then to be serious, — it had seemed to her that a rotten state of things existed in the set to which she had belonged, no one caring about, or being able to cope with all the boys and girls who ran loose like wild ponies, and who thought that it was smart and

quite the thing to plunge headlong into any adventure whether it led to tragedy or not. It would have been easy enough for any of those girls to have run off with half a dozen different boys at different times, on each occasion with the proper license in her pocket. The wealth of her family was all that was required to buy the incident off, and at the end of them all it was simplicity itself to wear the virginal wreath of a bride in one of the fashionable churches without comment. The curious part of it was that these young people bothered themselves about licenses at all, — a ludicrous deviation from their supreme individualism, a hypocritical conformity to the conventions which meant nothing in their scheme of self-indulgence.

And here she was, married, and facing the fulfillment; made over, rebuilt, altered out of all recognition. And no one, not even her mother, was more amazed than she.

In the room in which he had slept as a boy at the other end of that jolly old house of his, to which his grandfather and father had added and added again, Franklin did a little thinking that night, too, — more than usual. He had become an expert in thinking lately, a new and queer habit. The family had called his attention to the fact, as though he needed it called, that there would be no more dinners before Beatrix faced the ordeal. There was, everything going well, less than a month to endure, every hour a torture. . . . She had been awfully kind and gentle downstairs, patient and understanding. She had not pulled his leg for cowardice as she might have done and loved to do,

or twitted him for a sentimentality that usually bored her to tears. On the contrary, she had rewarded the confession that he had never intended to make with entire absolution and had let him see into the very sanctum of her heart in a way that had never happened before. She had liked him enough to marry him, that was obvious. She had even been fond of him, with sudden moments of passion. They could never be forgotten. But he had never permitted himself to dream that he really meant so much to her as she had told him that evening. He had no words with which to describe his amazement and gratitude. When it came to women and art he was helpless. He knew nothing of either. They were not in his line. He had really known nothing of Beatrix except her courage, her old intolerance, her old effrontery, her mischievous delight in putting herself in tight places just for the excitement of wriggling out. All those things had been easy to know. Her beauty, her charm, her unexpected flashes of idealism and spirituality set briefly alight by a sunset or a great deed, he knew as well. But it had been a trick, a habit, with her, to hide her real self behind a glittering screen of quick wit, cool impudence, and an assumption of fleeting interest, and he had often been puzzled, bewildered, though never less in love. He had told himself frequently before and since marriage that a man of his kind was born with the sort of brain that never would be able to follow the naked sensitiveness, the fine pride of a girl like Beatrix, that he was a boob when it came to his knowledge of her temperament and her tangents. That night, for the first time, she had stripped herself of all the pose and affectation that she had used to hide a strange shyness, and the effect was like that of a sud-

den breeze upon a sea fog. As men do, and always will, he had fallen in love with a young and lovely body, a face that had been born in his dreams, and a magnetism that had drawn him out of sanity, peace of mind, and self-preservation. He had desired her with a longing so overwhelming that the very ruin of his life was but a small return for gratification. As men do when they marry, he had taken a chance, gambled everything blindly and eagerly, knowing as little of this girl's character as her mother did, hoping and believing that she was all that he had idealized her into being, — poor devil. And now, as he walked up and down his room hour after hour, the fear of losing this precious thing was all the greater because he had been allowed to see into her soul, and had found there the simplicity, the dependence, the unselfishness, the loyalty, and above all the honesty with which his faith had invested her. And in the worst of all his attacks he told himself that it was no good to argue him into believing that there was nothing to worry about. Did people suppose that he'd gone through life with his eyes shut? There was Arthur Turner's wife, no older than Beatrix, and just as fit. *She didn't get through.* She left Arthur a boy, and went. . . . It happened every day. It made an infernal coward of him, and he offered no excuses. He simply said, "I love this girl. Can't you see that I love this girl, and that I can never prove how much I love her, or my gratitude for her love, unless she stays with me until I'm old?"

And then, elevated to the humbleness that brings men to their knees before God, he begged again that his wife might be allowed to stay with him.

III

AND it was in these moods and in these stages of emotion that Malcolm Fraser found his friend and the wife of his friend.

One of those disconcertingly early birds, he was up and about and halfway through his day's work before most people had pulled themselves together for the struggle. Therefore, as might have been expected, he drove his car up to the door of Franklin's cottage — and it wasn't a cottage any more with all its wings — just at the moment when the footman, minus a collar, was polishing the knocker. For a footman to be discovered without a collar is almost as tragic as for a girl who has bobbed her hair to be pounced upon before it has been rendered Hawaiian by the curling tongs.

Malcolm wore a pair of large goggle-glasses with tortoise-shell rims, and being a poet, and a good poet, — there is lots of difference — he was, of course, a little careless in the manner of his clothes. That is to say, he could not be bothered to pick out a tailor who would do what he was told, and then devote the necessary time to the choice of cloth and cut, but at the moment when the things that he was wearing had become disreputable, and people had begun to talk, he rushed into any shop whose windows displayed garments, and permitted a perfectly callous person to put him into a new and ludicrous suit which looked as though it had been borrowed from his younger

brother. He might have been so far as anybody could tell, then, the representative of a firm which doctored invalid trees, or an insurance agent, or any one of those rather pathetic adventurers who endeavor to extract a living out of life by forcing unnecessary things upon innocent people. And the footman regarded him as such, and said "No" abruptly before any question had been asked.

It so happened that Franklin had also been up for hours. He had been riding hard, and came along from the stables just at the moment when his old pal was about to tell the collarless man precisely that place to which he was best suited.

"Malcolm, my dear chap!"

"Pel, old son."

"Where the devil have you sprung from? Your last letter was written from Paris."

"I got back yesterday. I wanted to see you because you were writing worried things to me, and I wanted to see Bee before . . ."

And the two men stood and looked into each other's eyes with complete understanding. One of them had married the girl who was loved by both, and both of them were in the same kind of anxiety about her, neither of them knowing anything of women. The odd part of it is that the men who do know something about women are generally not men. It is the law of compensation.

Franklin betted that Malcolm wouldn't ask him "How is she?" and won. He knew how she was without that unnecessary question by the first glance at the face of the man with whom he had herded for years. It was very obvious to Franklin that Fraser had come over to stand by with that tremendous loy-

alty which was the keynote of his character, and this fact sent Franklin's spirits up higher than they had been for several months. How good to have a pal!

He turned to the car which was just as careless of its appearance as its owner. "Where's your luggage? You've come to stay, of course!"

Fraser echoed the word luggage, slanted his head, and seemed to be looking all the way back to New York, and into his rooms on Forty-fourth Street. "Isn't it in the car? Ought to be."

Franklin roared with laughter. "You complete idiot. You colossal fathead. You've left it in your bedroom, you've tilted it out into the road, or you've given it away."

"I wonder," said Fraser a little sheepishly. "I have a way of doing these things I'm afraid."

"All right. It doesn't matter. I can fit you up as I've fitted you up dozens of times. Hi! Just take this car round to the garage."

But Fraser intervened quickly. "As a matter of fact," he said, "I think I had better take her round. Nobody else seems to be able to say the sort of flattering things to her that make her start."

And while Franklin howled again, to the great joy of Beatrix who sat up in bed to listen, the bespectacled poet, who had the face of Ivanhoe, got in, sat down, assumed an expression of great tenderness, did one or two things with his hands, and waited murmuring. To his own astonishment, and everybody else's delight, the car functioned, and permitted herself to be driven round to the garage, from which he returned presently in triumph. "I'm no mechanic," he said gravely. "But I do understand something about psychology, and kindness is always repaid."

Upstairs in her room, out of earshot of these doings, Beatrix called Brownie. "Stand on your head, Brownie, Pelham's laughing and so Malcolm's here."

To which Mrs. Lester Keene replied, as was only to be expected, "I have never been taught to stand on my head." Which was a pity. All women should be taught to stand on their heads from time to time. It enables them to look at life from two angles instead of one.

Beatrix didn't come down to breakfast, — not because she wasn't feeling perfectly fit. She was. In fact she never felt better or more completely under mental and physical control, and, now that Pelham was laughing and Malcolm had come, more confident. A sense of shyness, and over and above that a gleam of imagination, kept her in her room. Dear old Mally had been in love with her since the time that she had trotted along at his side, a child, a sub-flapper, and eventually the girl who had come out with an imp on her shoulder. It did not require much intuition to know that the sight of her as she was would hurt this man terribly because, although he would follow Pelham headlong into hell, he loved her. And so, for this reason, she missed a jolly breakfast, during which Pelham forgot to be worried. But only temporarily. As soon as he found himself alone with Fraser things were said that can only be said by two men who had found each other out completely, — by camping, by being in mutual danger, and by having been through business transactions together, — the greatest of all

tests. The end of it was that Malcolm came to the conclusion that not only would Pelham be better away from Beatrix, but that Beatrix would have greater peace of mind with Pelham away. In coming to this conclusion, he was thinking as much of Pelham as of Beatrix, and exercising that queer sense of fairness which he had always used about these two, whom he had in a sort of way adopted as his children. Several of the letters that he had received from Pelham, during the last two months, and one long letter written by Beatrix had made him believe that the moment must come when they should be separated. He had left Paris at a time when she was wearing her most beautiful dress to do this thing, and there was only one way in which it could be done. High explosives wouldn't drive Pelham away. That was very certain. He would stick, stand by, and endure. Therefore, it was for Beatrix to send him away. He would carry out her wishes.

Just for a moment after Beatrix, duly settled into her chair on the porch, had sent for Malcolm, he was hit with the idea that he might be an interfering fool, that his sympathy and affection were being carried too far. He would have withdrawn and said nothing if he had not remembered certain phrases in those letters, and the things that Pelham had said in his own room that morning. Once more, he told himself that he knew precisely what Pelham was undergoing because he also had moments of the most profound anxiety, and that under the circumstances, whatever Pelham might have to say, it was better for Beatrix to be left alone, not to have the continual worry on her shoulders of this terror-stricken man, undermining her own

courage, and giving her other things to think about than the contemplation in peace of the coming event.

Good God, how wrong this man was! How little he knew women, and how large a seed of trouble he planted at that moment in the Eden of his friends.

He was allowed to go alone to see Beatrix. Pelham saw to that because his close association with a poet had given him imagination. Also because he tried to do for others what he would like others to do for him. He told Malcolm where he might find his wife, and went round to the stables. It was necessary for him to see that Sal Gal was bandaged with a nice cool cabbage.

“My dear old Mally,” she said.

And he took her hand and held it very tight, and didn’t try to speak because there was something in his throat. . . . Since she had been a mere kid, as devoid of affectation as a daffodil or a bird, he had loved her, —poor, damn poet, who wore goggles, and forgot his luggage, and put himself into reach-me-downs.

And so she said, “Isn’t it lovely here with everything just breaking out, and April over the hill at last. . . . I knew you’d come, Mally. I’ve been waiting to see you. You’re staying, of course.”

And he said, “Yes, of course. But only for a day or two. I’m working, my dear. Yes, I’m working, —I don’t mean writing poetry, although God knows that’s hard work enough. I have got a job. Frightfully dull, frightfully boring, but with a charming man, —an Englishman who lives in Paris, and who wanted a secretary who could waggle the pen to help

him to put his memoirs in order. Yes, he's one of those men who leave memoirs. I ought to have begun by telling you that he is the Earl of Invermorach, former Prime Minister, the most cultivated, and the most illusive of all British politicians."

"I don't see why you call that boring," said Beatrix. "Such a man and such a life," — putting her hand on his hand.

"No, that was ungrateful of me." And he didn't mean it. He didn't know what on earth he was talking about. He was saying these things so that he might not say the others that were on the tip of his tongue, — that he loved her, that he was jealous, that to see her like that in another man's house dug his heart out.

But the fact that Beatrix understood, and let him know that she understood, bridged over a moment that was very painful, and with her newly acquired tact, so astonishing to herself, and so amazing to everybody else, she chatted, laughed, and said things that made him laugh, and seemed so normal, so commonplace, and above all so healthy, that emotion receded like the waters of a swollen river, and Malcolm recovered. It was then, after a long talk, that he broached the subject of the temporary separation, and was rewarded by the most incredulous laugh that he had ever heard from Beatrix, — and that was saying something.

And so he let it go, but not before he had called her attention to the state of Pelham's nerves, and told her that it might be wise as well as kind to send him away. The constant sight of her added hourly terrors to his life.

To all of which he got this answer. "Mally, you're

a muddled-headed old poet, and you know nothing about men and women. Pelham won't leave me, and I won't be left. So there it is. I'm not annoyed at you. I'm not even slightly irritated, because you mean well and are a dear and whatever you do or say must be forgiven because you're the best friend we have. But, — say nothing more about this separation business. Do you understand? It isn't going to be done, old Goggles. So there. And now you can run along and play because I want to go on reading 'If Winter Comes.' I want to see how much longer it will be before Mark Sabre rides his bicycle down to the village, buys a woodchopper, returns home, and gives that terrible woman precisely what she deserves. If he doesn't do this pretty soon I shall scream, and throw the book away." And she held out her hand to Malcolm with that quite conscious royal gesture of hers, and gave him the sort of smile that a prima donna gives to a tuft hunter who has introduced himself on the deck of a liner. He was dismissed.

But he didn't go immediately and hunt for his friend, who would be only too glad to be taken off to play golf. He went round the wing of the house, down an incline of newly-cut lawn, and into a spinney of young trees all peppered with their first green. And here he stood in amazement, half glad, half sorry, and told himself that the old audacious, alluring Bee had grown up at last, becoming, oddly enough, more like the little girl that he had first known than the one who had come out of school as cool as a fish, as sophisticated as a society leader of fifty, and as incapable of grasping the fact that the earth did not revolve around herself as, — well, as an actor. Wonderful, wonderful!

But did she look to see if poor old much-nagged Mark forgot to be a saint and rode up the slight incline that led from his unhappy house to the village ironmonger's? No, she didn't. The book remained in her lap and the well-meant things that her old friend Mally had come to say rankled in her mind. It might be kind as well as wise to send her husband away, might it? What did he *mean* by saying a disturbing thing like that? She had always been selfish. She knew that. Everybody knew it. But why should this Malcolm man come back from Paris to read her a subtle lecture and take it for granted that she had not grown and flowered under the influence of love? If the constant sight of her added hourly terrors to Pelham's life, he had only to say so to be told to go. He had confessed to terror, standing open to her eyes behind his shattered fourth wall, but never as much as by the tail of a hint had he suggested flight. . . . Was she still the colossal egotist, still the supremely selfish, spoilt girl to keep him at her side through a time in which she, too, had her moments of terror, — though she refused to let them stay? It would be very lonely without him, very dismal without the sound of his step, the thrill of his voice, the eager touch of his hand. And all the evenings without their games of cards and games of courage, and long, long talks would be hard to bear. "I'm very young," she said to that April morning. "And this is my first baby. . . ."

That night, when she had been put to bed, and Mrs. Keene was about to go along to her own room to in-

dulge in her inevitable practice of placing scraps of her hair into a collection of strange-looking curlers, Beatrix stopped her. "Oh, Brownie!" she said. "Will you please go down and ask Mr. Franklin to come and see me? Please Brownie." This was added because as usual with women of her type, Mrs. Lester Keene was just going to say, "Don't you think that . . ." or "Wouldn't it be better if . . ."

And so Brownie went down. She found Pelham and Malcolm in the room in which they had spent many good hours in the old days, smoking themselves into dried herrings, and talking about everything under the sun except women. The long, low-ceilinged room, lined with bookshelves, and hung with trophies of sport, — antlers, and heads, and mounted fish, — was filled with the aroma of excellent pipe mixture in which there was the recognizable tang of Latakia. Malcolm was lying full stretch on a huge settee with his hands under his head, and Pelham was standing with his back to the fireplace, erect as usual, with his long legs wide apart, and with the look all about him that goes with hard exercise and the lack of self-indulgence.

Mrs. Keene detested tobacco, and would willingly have signed her name to a petition to prohibit its use, being one of those strange creatures who still believe, in the face of all proofs to the contrary, that human nature can be regulated by law. And so she stood near the door, and gave a little cough which, it is quite certain, would earn another mark against her name on the chart of the recording angel, — such coughs being worse to the peace and satisfaction of the home than raucous screams and shouted blasphemy.

Disturbed in the middle of an argument about dry flies, Pelham looked up. "Oh, hello, Brownie," he

said, darting a wink at the poet. "Come on in and smoke a cigarette."

It was wonderful to see the way in which this little brown woman, who had no more humor than a plate, and not as much sense of the ridiculous as a Toby jug, covered the intervening space between the door and the rug in front of the fireplace. Holding her chin very high and her head on one side, she walked like a turkey across a barnyard, with the flat footed jauntiness that belongs to those edible beasts who are so happy to know that they are many cuts above the common or garden domestic fowl. She illustrated in herself all that goes with what is middle-class everywhere. "I don't see how you can stand it," she said with a sniff. "Filling your lungs with nicotine."

Malcolm sprang to his feet, and made a gesture which asked Mrs. Keene to take possession of the sofa, knowing all the time that she also detested sofas because they were so undignified, and lead to great carelessness in everyday life.

To the immense relief of both men, she delivered her message, coughed again, gave an individual bow, and turkeyed herself away.

Out of the room almost as soon as she was, Pelham took the stairs like a man in seven league boots, and found Beatrix sitting up in bed, scented, powdered, and as smooth as a summer day. There were no lights except one in a rosy shade that hung above her delicious head.

"You want me?"

"Yes, old boy."

"Anything wrong?"

"No, nothing at all." She motioned him to sit on the edge of the bed.

But he didn't. He went down on his knees, and put his lips to her arm.

There was a funny little smile playing round her mouth. She had been thinking all day. Malcolm's seed had taken root in her mind. Without a doubt it would be less selfish to send Pelham away than to keep him tied to apron strings. Without a doubt. . . . Yes, but would he go?

"Have you had a good day?" she asked.

"Excellent," he said.

"More excellent than all the days you've had alone with me?"

He refused to answer so preposterous a question. He put his lips to her round white neck, and answered it.

"I'm not jealous of Mally," she said. "'Friend that sticketh closer than a brother.' He's made you laugh again for the first time for weeks. A man needs a man, I know that. . . . Doesn't he?"

He wasn't listening very hard. How could he when she looked so frightfully nice among those pillows?

As for him, with all those eighteen months of tenderness and consideration and all the years ahead, please God, to let her prove her own, he should be shown whether she was selfish or not. Beatrix Vanderdyke, or Beatrix Franklin, — and so should Malcolm Fraser.

"Where's the *Galatea*?" she asked, switching to a tangent.

"The *Galatea*? What on earth has put the *Galatea* into your head?"

"Does that matter? I asked you where she is?"

"In the East River, just out of dry dock. She's just been scraped and painted. I had these things done while you're like this. I thought it'd be a good scheme to take you aboard as soon after as possible for a cruise."

"I shall love it," said Beatrix. . . . "Don't you think it might be a good idea if you oiled her up by going for a little cruise first?"

"When?"

"To-morrow."

He looked at her in amazement. "What? Leave you?"

"Why not? You must think about the *Galatea*."

"Damn the *Galatea*!"

But she didn't laugh, much as she was tempted. He wouldn't go. He wouldn't go, do what she might to persuade him. Malcolm was a poet, of course, but what did he know about prose? "Well," she said, keeping a perfectly straight face, "I've been wondering lately whether it wouldn't be better for both of us if you went away for a bit."

"It wouldn't be better for me," he said quickly.

"Well, for me, then."

"Better for you!" His heart fell into his boots with a thud.

"Yes," she said. "I mean. . . . Oh, dash! It's awfully difficult to put it exactly as it ought to be put. You see, you're upset, and all that, and I've got to be as quiet as I can, and so forth. . . ."

There was a long pause during which Beatrix repeated to herself over and over again with glee and triumph, "He ought to go, but he won't, he won't." And Pelham said inwardly, "I'm a brute, a selfish

brute. I'm worrying her. I'm in the way. Damn everything!" Finally he bent forward and kissed her, and said, "I'm most awfully sorry. That's what comes of marrying a man who doesn't know anything about women." He wasn't in the least hurt. She had the right to send him away or keep him by her side, or issue any other commands that might occur, being like that. He was, on the contrary, abominably annoyed to think that he had been so selfish and so little under control as to make a nuisance of himself, and let her see that his thoughts insisted on flying into a possible tragic future. "I'll go away to-morrow then, but you must swear to send for me when the time comes."

"I swear," she said, and she did, roundly, though not for him to hear. All the same Mally was wrong as she had betted. Pelham didn't want to go, and wouldn't go under any circumstances but for the way in which she had put it. She had been just a little bit too clever. . . . Should she confess at once that this was the outcome of a competition with her unselfishness, that she had put him to a sort of test as a sop to her vanity, and tell him that she didn't want him to go in the least, and would be desperately lonely without him? Devil take that poet! No. Perhaps she had better let it go now. Pelham's nerves were all over the place, and he was looking rather drawn and haggard from lack of sleep. It would do him good to get away. For his sake she would let it stand as it was. But he didn't want to go, he didn't, that was certain.

So she ran her finger over his small moustache, a trick that she was fond of indulging in because he would have killed anybody else who had dared to

attempt it. "All right then, to-morrow," she said. "Take Malcolm, and ask your cousin. She'll look after you, and talk a donkey's hind leg off. You'd better ring her up to-morrow. She'll adore to cancel all her plans and dash off at a tangent." She put her arm round his neck suddenly. "Do you want to go, Pel?"

"You know I don't."

"Then why are you going?"

"Because you want to me to go."

Yes, she had been just a little bit too clever, and she could keep him by raising one finger. But Mally should see, and she would show herself what love can do.

And so, never one to let the grass grow under her feet, Beatrix was on the telephone early the following morning. Aunt Honoria, to whom she spoke first, considered that she had made a very wise decision. She, too, had come to the conclusion that Pelham, by wandering about the house like a turbulent spirit was making himself a source of worry to Beatrix, disturbing her peace of mind and bodily well-being. She thought that a short cruise on the *Galatea* in waters near enough to the shore to be in daily communication with his home would do him good, would help him to recover his confidence and balance and to look sanely on an event which, after all, was taking place every minute of the day in every part of the world. And then, seeing her chance to indulge in a little limelight, Aunt Honoria suggested that it might be helpful and pleasant if she came over and stayed

with Beatrix while Pelham was away. And Beatrix jumped at the offer. There would be lonely evenings without Pelham. She must have someone to play with and to talk to. She wouldn't have ventured to suggest the idea to Aunt Honoria because this good lady was one of the leading spirits in all the charitable schemes in New York City. She not only lent her name to committees, but worked on them, managing to extract large sums of money from her brother for such worthy causes as the Dug-Out, summer camps for poor children, and the hundred and one causes which are dependent in all civilizations upon charity. This woman who had lost the man she loved in her youth and remained faithful, was a born mother, but it was upon other women's children that she was obliged to lavish her warm affections, and among them the dearest of all was Beatrix.

The captain of the *Galatea* was the next to be called up, and he was informed that Mr. Franklin, Mr. Fraser, and a small party would be aboard that evening. Would he move heaven and earth to have everything ready for them? He would. It was perfectly simple looking to the fact that the yacht was only to cruise in home waters and supplies could be obtained daily. The next on the list was Franklin's brainy cousin, Elizabeth, married to a man called Hector McKenzie, who had brought reserve and self-possession to a fine art, and who daily left a house on East Something Street of equal reserve and self-possession to sit in the sort of office which might have been devised by Lee Simonson for a Theatre Guild production, where he did nothing but suspend a fat gold pencil over a very clean writing pad, and receive financial experts from all parts of the world, who came armed with intro-

ductions from Kings, Governments, and Soviets, which led to large loans. Otherwise he did not appear to have anything to occupy his attention. Mrs. McKenzie was thrilled. There was nothing she adored so much as suddenly to throw up all her plans, and go on the water, because only in a yacht was it possible to get away from the persistence of the telephone. Yes, she might certainly bring her friend, Mrs. Beamish, just over from the other side. She would be very handy as a fourth at Bridge. . . . Beamish. What did that name suggest but a hard-bosomed woman with big hips, straight, thin lips, and rimless glasses which pinched the top of her nose into a little nob? A candidate for Parliament probably. Poor old Pel!

And then, arguing herself out of a desire to cry — a thing which she hated to do — confirming over and over again her wish to believe that a little holiday would do Pelham all the good in the world, Beatrix proceeded to get up, and go through her exercises, give Brownie a list of superfluous duties, and finally seat herself at her place at the table exactly one minute before Pelham and Malcolm entered the dining room for lunch.

They found a smiling, capable, energetic young person acting hard in order to convey the impression that she was at peace with the world and extremely pleased at her efficiency and managerial capabilities. They were then informed of everything that had been arranged and told that they must be ready to drive away at three o'clock to the very tick in order to be on board in time to welcome Elizabeth and her elderly friend from England.

“Who the deuce?”

“A Mrs. Beamish, Pel. But don't worry. Sometimes names are amazingly misleading.”

Pelham was unable to grumble in his beard, but his eyebrows met in the middle and there was anything but cheerful conformity round his mouth. He loved the *Galatea*. She stood for the open spaces, but he had no desire to see them at that time. He was being sent away like a naughty boy. He deserved it, but he hated it all the same.

As for Malcolm, he was feeling something of the satisfaction of the Priest who breaks up a happy home with what is supposed to be the subtlety of the Jesuits for the personal satisfaction of doing what he calls “best for everybody.” He sat with a cat-like smile on his face, beatific and pontifical. He congratulated himself upon having been the means of getting his two friends out of a most delicate position with great tactfulness.

He had nothing to pack because he had brought nothing. It was arranged that he should call at his rooms on the way through town and get what he wanted. Pelham had nothing to pack because he kept duplicates of everything on the *Galatea*, — one of his fixed ideas being a detestation of baggage. Who said that money is filthy lucre?

It was perhaps a little unfortunate that Aunt Honoria arrived at the moment when the car stood ready at the door. No out-going Prime Minister very much cares about seeing his place occupied by his successor before he has made a dignified exit. It rubs it in too hard. Aunt Honoria's charming bluntness did something, however, to dispel this feeling. She said, “I think you are very wise, Pelham. — Go and amuse yourself. There is no reason why you

shouldn't. Beatrix can do her job much better without watching you try to do it. I'll see that you are recalled at the proper time, and if 'willing' can do any good, you will come back to be told the three best words in the world, — 'it's a boy'." And then she turned to Malcolm so that Pelham could say a few words to Beatrix.

But it was she who spoke first, — sitting on what had become her place on the porch, bathed in sunlight, with books and magazines all about her, and her feet on a chair. "So long, old boy," she said lightly, smiling up. "Have a good time."

His kiss sent the blood spinning through her veins and told her, better than a million feeble words, the story of his love and hunger and sympathy and fright.

And like all women who are all woman, she, even then, with the car at the door and everything settled and all arguments weighed, tried to tempt him not to do what she had decided was right for him to do. She put his hand to her lips and her heart into her eyes. "Do you want to go away and leave me, Pel?"

"Damn everything, you know I don't!"

"Then why are you going, my darling boy?"

"Because you want to me to go and I must do what you want."

Well, there it was then. She had been just a little bit too clever. And the blessed Malcolm had butted-in abominably. But all the same it was better for Pel and better for her to practise unselfishness for once and after all there was Aunt Honoria.

For mile after mile Pel had nothing to say. He gave himself the worst mental thrashing of his life for his confounded egotism in letting Beatrix know how he felt about her and himself. He deserved to be

sent away, but as to his having a good time . . . waiting on tenterhooks, every hour bringing nearer to the gate the girl whom he loved and adored. . . .

And for a little while, all alone, with her feet on a chair, Beatrix brushed away a series of tears that would insist on running over and spoiling her make-up. And while she laughed at herself for these for which she was all responsible, plumed herself a little for having achieved what she considered to be the Parnassus of unselfishness, and caught her breath at the realization of having to face her trouble within a handful of days, she allowed a bubble of disappointment to enter her soul, an infinitesimal sense of grievance against Pelham to take possession of her because he had deserted her at such a time.

“You went away, Oh, Pel, you went away!” she called after him in her heart.

“But you told me to go, you told me to go!” she heard him say, utterly bewildered, poor devil.

“I know I did, — but you went, and you oughtn’t to have gone.”

But when Aunt Honoria came round to the porch to talk to the girl who only a few years ago had been a baby, and was now, by the grace of God, to have a baby of her own, she found her not in tears but laughter at the way in which things had shaped themselves. She had repeated to herself that this had been a competition in unselfishness. She knew the worst side of marriage, its sham and its shame, and so, playing up to Pelham’s standard, she had sacrificed her desire to keep him at her side on the altar of marriage

as it ought to be. Without discussion she had vowed with exaltation to live up to the law of give and take because this was not, as everybody seemed to think, the end but the beginning, — the delicate and difficult and beautiful beginning of life and the bearing of life, and the day by day building up in the small plain circle of a wedding ring an inspiration and a thanksgiving. . . .

And the woman who was childless because of a great love, and the girl who was to have a child for the same reason sat together and watched the changes made by long soft hours of sun and newborn hope.

April had come over the hill. And when Pelham came home in May. . . .

PART II

I

EVEN before the landing stage of the New York Yacht Club had faded out of sight Elizabeth McKenzie had drawn her chair into the sun on the star-board side of the *Galatea*. Her thick coat was not enough to keep out the touch of ice that was in the wind so she had wrapped one brown rug round her shoulders and another round her knees. And there she sat, silent for once, with a sense of pride in the river that gave her favorite city so dramatic a note, with a smile on that good-natured face of hers with its large mouth and large nose, twinkling gray eyes that let nothing escape her and eyebrows like those of a man, her artistic sense touched frequently by the effects of light and shade on the pageant of buildings, all that was still young in her exhilarated by the feeling of buoyancy that came from moving swiftly on water. She wore a hat in which no other American woman would have been seen dead, her face, as usual, utterly and even blatantly devoid of make-up.

In the Colony Club there were two diametrically opposite opinions as to this vital and exuberant lady. The old-fashioned members, rigid in their worship of the conventions, regarded her as a pronounced freak, a woman who dressed deliberately out of the fashion, who considered herself to be brainy and who discussed the problems of the day with a most distressing free-

dom, including the Freudian system of psychoanalysis, which she had the temerity to dismiss as quackery, and the question of birth control, which, if you please, she advocated as the only means, except wars and famines, of slowing down the preposterous overcrowding of the world, — perfectly shocking! They sat dumb-founded while on every possible occasion she riddled governments with her extravagant sarcasm, tore political heroes from their self-made pedestals and flung them back into obscurity, dealt with woman's suffrage as though it were a huge farce which added further illiteracy to an already dangerously illiterate vote, and talked of religions as though they were the fetishes of ignorant and superstitious natives of far-off islands. To the younger members, by whom Elizabeth McKenzie was not yet regarded as an octogenarian although she was on the shady side of forty, this rather dear soul was looked upon as amusing and entertaining and different, fearless, eccentric and sometimes witty. They didn't mind the fact that she had invented a sort of uniform, hard, neat and black and refused to appear in short skirts and have her hair bobbed, — fashions that had broken out even among matrons. Nor did they mind her failure to subscribe to the new vogue among the super-smart of appearing in the evening in clothes that made them look as though they had dressed for amateur theatricals to walk on as ladies of the bedchamber who belonged to the reign of Henry VIII. They agreed that she was an extremely good sport, an expert bridge player, was all in favor of the flapper and dead against what she called, in her most abrupt manner, "frowst," by which she meant that she held in great impatience and dislike every person and every institution, every room and every

idea that was stuffy, that reeked of hypocrisy, that was hung about with outworn platitudes. The Senate, according to her, and the House of Commons, were frowsty. So were many doctors, most divines, nearly all the stars of the stage and some of the most high-brow of the magazines, in which the so-called intelligentsia ran anæmically amok and went into ecstasies of admiration about such egregiously stupid things as "The Hairy Ape." She was, to them, a fresh air fiend actually and metaphorically prepared at any moment to settle the great problems that had risen out of the chaos of peace by the letting in of air, light and commonsense, — a sort of Lady Astor, though without either her beauty or her cheek.

As a matter of fact, both these estimates failed in getting at the true character of Elizabeth McKenzie. She was really a very simple soul of more than average intelligence and sympathy, kind, charitable and easily moved to emotion. Her bursts of loud laughter and excitement were the barricades behind which she hid a great sensitiveness. She had no children and so permitted her superabundant energy to carry her off into all sorts of tangents. She would have made a wonderful wife for a portrait painter and filled his studio with clients or customers, or whatever the word is in artistic circles. All other means failing, she would have picked up and carried rich women to the dais and the palette. Better still she would have been a most efficient helpmate to the manager of a circus, played the part of Brigadier General among the troupe, seen that the sad elephants were properly hosed every morning and the tame wild animals kept in a daily state of perfect hygiene. As it was, she was the wife of Hector McKenzie the great financier who was married

body and soul to Wall Street; of East Something Street, New York, of Hillside, Huntington, Long Island and of Rock Edge, Bar Harbor, Maine, with a box at the Opera, a seat on the Committee of nearly every political and social Society in the City and the star member of the Colony Club, — an achievement in itself. Among other things she had a most disturbing way of falling desperately in love with British lecturers, American Generals, French Scientists, Russian ex-aristocrats and, from a quite discreet distance, with flat-nosed pugilists. And when she collected a number of these people together in that charming room at her club which ought to have been an aviary she caused a thrill to run through the whole delightful building and hurry calls to go forth urging unoccupied members to turn up instantly for the fun.

Having created a record in silence she beckoned to Pelham who was stalking up and down with all his thoughts at home and asked him to sit down. He did so reluctantly. Theoretically he was rather fond of his cousin. Actually he would any day walk ten miles over loose pebbles to avoid the possibility of a conversation.

“My word,” she began, “but it’s good to be out here. This is the way to procure the proper sort of spring clean. Great idea of yours, Pelham.”

“Yes, but as it happens it wasn’t my idea.” Who could blame him for being considerably sulky under the circumstances.

“Oh, I see . . . well, although I know nothing about it, — it’s the only thing I don’t know anything about — I can well understand how unsettling it must be to have a loving husband knocking around the house before the arrival of the first baby. I congratulate

Beatrix. She's growing up without a doubt. Let's have a look at you."

A most disconcerting and amazing request. Pelham shied at personalities like a horse at a dead cat. But he turned his face to her with all the courage and patience that he could muster and uttered a silent prayer that this flagrantly unself-conscious person who did everything for the best would get it over as quickly as she could. Women who said "Let's have a look at you" were to be placed in the same category of avoidances as photographers. He expected and rather hoped for a flippant remark. Something culled from a comic paper in which the coming of babies is invariably treated with the sort of snickering levity that makes fastidious people sick.

He was hopelessly out of it. Elizabeth McKenzie was a woman of many surprises. She bent forward, looked deeply into his eyes and laid her hand on his arm. She said, "My dear man, you're right to let this thing move you as it does. There's nothing that offers so great a hostage to happiness and the continuance of love as the deed that Beatrix is performing for you and herself. I talk about it as an outsider, a woman who is not among the lucky ones, being married to a financier, but I advise you to come out at night on the deck of this yacht of yours, achieve humbleness if you can and get in touch with the survivors of death who have had children and gone. They'll help you, because they're very kind."

And it was not because Pelham was any longer bored by the examination that he turned away but because strange things were happening to his cousin's face, and all the pent-up longing that was in her soul and the intense disappointment which had followed her

through her married life confessed themselves too plainly in her emotion.

A light laugh came over to them on the breeze. Malcolm Fraser had brought the McKenzie protégée out and was arranging her in a deck chair — an excellent excuse for changing the conversation. “What do you think of my latest, Pel?”

“I haven’t thought,” he said.

“Well, I think you’d better begin. She’s worth it. Take a look at her now and tell me if she isn’t one of the most attractive girls you’ve ever seen.”

Franklin “took” a look. The hard bosomed woman with big hips, straight thin lips and rimless glasses that pinched the top of her nose into a little nob, was, in reality, one of those tiny people who look too young and slight to be allowed to go out alone and who ease their way through life asking mutely for the protection not only of all rough males but of their wives and sisters as well. Under a small smart hat a few curls of bobbed hair had been artfully arranged. The profile with its tiny turned-up nose, sensitive mouth with very red lips, and a little round chin, all belonged to someone who did not seem to be a day older than seventeen. Everything about her suggested water-colors,—the colors of the sweet pea, elusive and delicate. Probably her temperament was water-colored, light and easily hurt, and it appeared to Pelham, although he was a rank amateur in the business, that she would be more suited to a small gold frame than out in life, or a conservatory carefully protected from the frost among equally sensitive plants. And he said, “Yes, very nice.”

Which earned one of Mrs. McKenzie’s most robust laughs. “Nice! My dear man, nice isn’t the word.

It's delicious. If I were a person of the male gender anywhere between eighteen and eighty that girl would play the devil with my entire constitution. I'd follow her round the world, break up a happy home, ruin a reputation and commit every known criminality to win a single kiss. I would, I swear it. She turned up in New York two weeks ago with a letter of introduction to me from Lady Risborough, who was, if you remember, one of the Pennys of Philadelphia. Extraordinary, or is it extraordinary, how completely democratic America has captured the aristocracy of Great Britain. She's been staying with me ever since. I can't let her out of my sight. It doesn't seem either to be kind or wise."

"Mrs. Beamish, did you say? She doesn't look old enough to be married."

"She isn't. But she's been Mrs. Valentine Beamish, the wife of the youngest Major in the Royal Air Force, since 1915, she tells me. She's the daughter of an Oxford Don and an actress, — a peculiar mixture which must mean something. I should have thought by the look of her that she was the outcome of a union between a landscape gardener and a female harpist. Anyway, there she is and I'm responsible for her in this country. It worries me a good deal, because every man who has met her up to now has gone blah in his boots. I gather that she's not very happy with the flying Valentine, although she's never gone into details. She has escaped in order, probably, to recover her self-respect and obtain a change of scene. She has loads of clothes and a certain amount of fairly good jewelry, but not, I take it, a superabundance of cash. She's always saying that she's as poor as a church mouse, but, of course, that all depends on the church.

Be kind to her, won't you, and ask Malcolm to make himself her big brother."

"I'll do my best," said Pelham. "The main thing is this: Does she play Bridge?"

"Like a streak."

"Oh, well then."

And having had enough of Elizabeth McKenzie's brooklike flow of words he got up to go and speak to the skipper. The *Galatea* was not the same with women on board. And before dinner he went ashore and sent off the following telegram to Beatrix.

"Cold wind Elizabeth talking donkey's hind leg off Mrs. Beamish doesn't live up to her name and plays bridge like a streak all my love."

II

AND when this was read to Beatrix over the telephone by an operator who looked upon politeness as undemocratic and translated streak into steak, having been prevented, probably, from getting away to her evening meal, Aunt Honoria saw so introspective an expression on her niece's face that she ventured to ask if anything was the matter.

"Mrs. Beamish," replied Beatrix, "is a young and pretty woman."

"And who, pray, is Mrs. Beamish and why shouldn't she be young and pretty?"

Before replying to these questions Beatrix walked slowly to the other end of the long low-ceilinged draw-

ing-room, of which, since she had weeded out of it a number of the clashing pieces of furniture collected by Pelham's indiscriminate forbears, she had grown extremely fond. Her untrained though naturally artistic eye had immediately been hurt by the close juxtaposition of fine old Colonial bits with florid things of the Empire period; of family portraits in oils with the airy and somewhat indiscreet pictures of the early French school to which grandfather Franklin had fallen victim. All these had been removed to the various guest rooms leaving the drawing-room with the charming and dignified air that belonged to the time of Washington in which the aristocratic Aunt Honoria with her white hair and high-bridged nose and unpurchasable simplicity made another appropriate picture.

"Mrs. Beamish," added Beatrix, returning, "has been taken on the *Galatea* by Elizabeth McKenzie and is going to help Pel to forget about me. Am I jealous? Ask me that. I can see it on the tip of your tongue."

"Always willing to oblige, my dear. Are you?"

With Pelham absent and Malcolm Fraser away and only the elderly lady present, Beatrix was glad to walk about for a change. With the proper vanity of young women in that circumstance she was very reluctant to be seen at a disadvantage by all male persons. "I don't know," she replied, perfectly frankly. "Just for a second or so I believe I was, and it had the astonishing and I suppose rather good effect of bringing me to earth from the pedestal on which Pel and you and mother and father have perched me since I began to play the game. In a sort of mental still I could see a frightfully pretty girl making hay with Pelham and applying sympathy to his present mood. Any fright-

fully pretty girl would seize the chance. There is no loyalty among women. Not as much as there is among opera singers. And I kicked myself for being so careless as not to have found out all details of Elizabeth's latest adoption before I agreed to let her go aboard. But on the way back from the other end of the room my knowledge of Pel made me thoroughly ashamed of the feeling, and now I'm as right as rain." And she hummed a little tune to prove it.

Aunt Honoria had known Pelham all his life. She had seen him break from a clean-eyed boy into a healthy-minded adolescence and go in for exercise and bodily development. She had wondered a little at his love of disappearing from the haunts of the ultra-civilized men to which he belonged to devote himself to big game hunting. He must have thrown back to an ancestor of pre-Mayflower days. His father, grandfather and great-grandfather had been, she knew, rather given to a fondness for the flesh-pots in the intervals of the business which had prospered so amazingly as to put them among the original millionaires of America. His grandfather especially had been a very gay dog. But she was no sceptic, and had a great belief in human nature. She believed especially in Pelham Franklin and placed him among those men who had not done without the society of women because they were misogynists but because they were idealists; men who having, as boys, built up a dream of the perfect woman stored it away like a precious thing and found no interest in imitations, — were able, luckily, to be faithful to their ideal and play a waiting game. Most women, even without scepticism, would not have carried their respect for men or their lack of sex vanity so far. They would have told them-

selves sympathetically that a good-looking, most eligible man like Franklin could have held to his ideal while he consoled himself with the nearest approach to it. But Aunt Honoria had retained her own idealism and never read French and, therefore, she was quite sure that Franklin, although married, was to be trusted out of sight of his wife during this very difficult period of his life, even in the company of a young and pretty woman who was without loyalty to her sex. There were other men, as she had said, who would have slipped off, deliberately, at a tangent, during this time, being dishonest and without self-restraint. In which case, Beatrix would have had every reason, married to one of them, to feel jealous. She banked on Pelham and said so, and won an enthusiastic kiss for so doing.

Whereupon, all being well, Beatrix sat down to play "Canfield." She missed the good smell of Pelham's pipe tobacco more than she thought it sporting to admit. He had never been away from her before. Aunt Honoria dallied with an illustrated monthly, the advertising pages of which were filled with the alluring drawings of many of the European hotels that she knew so well. And they made a charming picture of evening content, these two, sharing the comfortable warmth of a log fire and the well-shaded light of two reading lamps; Aunt Honoria almost the last of the women who maintained a straight back while sitting with no unhappy exposure of leg, and yet succeeded in conveying the impression that she was at perfect ease and at the same time ready to meet any emergency without the scampered rearrangement of attitude that goes with this very careless period when women have discarded tradition with

their corsets and imagine that by burying their noses in powder they have hidden the remainder of their ungracefulness. And after ten minutes of the sort of equable silence that can only exist when people are on the most understanding terms Beatrix burst out laughing.

“What do you find so funny, my dear?”

“Myself,” said Beatrix. “If anyone had prophesied, eighteen months ago, that I should ever have been found playing this futile little game I should have been perfectly certain that he was qualifying for a lunatic asylum.”

“So should I,” said Aunt Honoria.

“All the same, as it turns out, he would have been a man with more knowledge of the possibilities of the flapper than most, wouldn’t he?”

“Yes, in your case, — as it turns out. But then, as I always said, you had only to fall in love with the right man to become a credit to the family.” And having stated this with that air of finality which goes with everyone whose prognostication on any subject has come true by accident, Aunt Honoria returned to her magazine.

Beatrix had, however, dined well. She was, moreover, doing well. In addition to which she was no longer in the position, being married and being hostess, to accept her very definite Aunt’s dictums as though they were gospel. She could argue with her now, feeling delightfully on the same level, and, for the sheer joy of getting even with many a forced and apparently respectful silence, she jolly well would.

She put down an ace and drew in a long breath. “I know that you always said that, Aunt Honoria,” she began, “but —” and what a tremendous step it

marked in her career to be able to add that word — “I don’t think I’ve become a credit to the family by just falling in love. Sooner or later I should have become a credit to the family anyhow.”

It was thrilling to see in the elder woman’s enquiring look not the old astonishment but a new deference, — of all women this one.

“The flapper is a much misunderstood animal,” continued Beatrix, hiding her triumph and enjoyment behind an air that was just sufficiently casual. “I can see that now, looking back. She’s made of exactly the same stuff as the flappers of every other period but she does openly what they did behind a hedge of humbug. She discarded deceit with her petticoat and from the day that she openly declared herself the possessor of a pair of legs scrapped all the old conventions.”

“She did indeed!” said Aunt Honoria.

“It was a frightful blow to early Victorianism but it marked the declaration of independence on the part of every sound girl. Like all revolutionaries we carried things a bit to extremes, of course. We made parental discipline a farce, I own, but that was because parental discipline had proved itself to be unhealthy and retrogressive. When we asked, ‘why’ to all the ‘don’ts’ that were thrown at us, the only answer we got was ‘Because I say so’, and that wasn’t wise and it wasn’t logic. We had ceased to believe that parents were infallible and were determined to buy our own experience. Rather an expensive hobby in many cases, perhaps, but one that had suddenly become the fashion. We believed ourselves to be women of the world at sixteen and having no mysteries to discover wasted no time lurking in dark corners, peering at life through a keyhole. Out we went into the open, fearless and

sophisticated, on equal terms with men. The modern débutante who has been so much rotted by novelists and newspaper people has really done more to improve the world than all the suffrage stuff piled into a heap. Her honesty and wide-eyedness and her utter contempt of simpering sentimentality have given her the finest sort of protection and this has reacted in a wonderful way on all the boys who help her to make things hum. They are sounder and more healthy too, which, believe me, is something to have achieved. As for me, coming back to that, I was on the very verge, when I met Pelham, of putting on the brakes and running in conformity to law and order. I might still be a spinster if I hadn't fallen in love with him and I shouldn't be playing solitaire now, or acting as your hostess, but flapperism would have worn itself out as it always does and I should have become a perfectly amenable though a rather tired young woman, ready and willing to settle down and become the mother of the future."

Aunt Honoria gave a little bow. She had been gifted with a sufficient sense of humor to appreciate her niece's delight in making this daring contradiction, and was thankful for the reason that enabled her to do so. Inwardly, however, she refused to accept this justification of the flapper, who was to her, and would always be, an unruly young vulgarian, an anarchist and one who stood very badly in need of corporal punishment. The very early Victorianism that made it impossible for her to agree with Beatrix made it equally impossible to argue the point with her as hostess. The period to which she clung had as many good as it had bad points. Indeed, to those old enough to make a comparison between post-war civilization and that complacent though much satirized time with

its ignorance of the telephone and the motor car, its false hustle and sensational press, its moving pictures and its radiophone, its victrola and its jazz, its good points far exceeded its bad ones. Then, at any rate, there had been respect for elders and general good breeding, dignity and elbow-room, a lack of noise and feverish amusement-seeking, a heavy but respectable press and a pleasant smugness and conformity to convention which made for solidity, whiskers and family vaults. And then, too, it was the habit to breed great men in art, letters and politics which has to-day gone completely out of fashion, perhaps because of the present desire to avoid apprenticeship, the sleepless nights and the laborious days and start at the top of the ladder without having taken the trouble to mount it rung by rung. There is, in consequence, an ever-lengthening list of tin-pot gods and exploded pigmies.

All this Aunt Honoria merely thought, smiling. And while Beatrix, smiling too, continued her game of Canfield, better called Patience, the elder lady left the beginning and the end of her magazine to run lightly through its least important part, the middle, and a pleasant silence prevailed in that charming room again. The chair in which Pelham sat after dinner with his long legs stuck out, the inevitable pipe between his teeth and a book about birds or beasts on his reading stand, was conspicuously empty, but there was a wonderful and mysterious sense of another live thing with Beatrix, — tiny movements and impatiences. . . .

III

THE wind was still cold. Mrs. Beamish announced, nevertheless, that she was going to take a walk on deck before turning in. Was anyone inclined to join her? No one was. She asked this question with her eyes on Pelham. What could he do, therefore, but get up, help her into her coat and lead the way out, leaving Malcolm, who had merely unfolded his legs, to settle down again, start a fresh cigar and put the cards away?

“Women on yachts,” said Pelham inwardly, receiving a southwest buffet in the face for his impertinence.

The sky was clear and as filled with lights as a great city seen from an aeroplane. In a yacht club on the shore near by a dance was going on and Zuluesque music was blowing over the intervening water. A new moon looked like the delicate eyebrow of a child. And for half an hour these two walked up and down on the port side.

Pelham had killed the evening pretty well. Everyone had played good Bridge and the cards had been sportingly divided. Mrs. McKenzie had talked rather less than usual, having been continually sat upon, and Mrs. Beamish had proved herself to be not only an expert but one of those rare women who did not indulge in the incessant back chat which generally goes with feminine play, to the utter destruction of concentration. At that very moment, he knew, Beatrix, having been talked into bed by Brownie, was sitting up among a pile of pillows under her little pink lamp

waiting for Mark Sabre to return from the village on his old bicycle with a chopper. Aunt Honoria had, of course, prevented her from getting any further into the book since he had left home, a week ago as it seemed already. He owed one to Malcolm for that. How absurd it was to suppose that he would be less anxious away from Beatrix than with her. The point that he must rub in had nothing to do with self, however. He had made himself a nuisance and been got rid of. Serve him jolly well right. For all that it was his privilege to curse because he had been removed and thank Heaven that Malcolm had had the imagination to see that his removal would take away from Beatrix all chance of catching the infection of his terror. So there it was. All the same he had made no promise to anyone not to be beastly disagreeable, there was some satisfaction in that. He intended to make Malcolm wish that he had remained in Paris and both the women fervently sorry that they had ever set foot on the *Galatea*. What was the use of being a man and not being human?

“ I beg your pardon? ”

With an air of patience that Mrs. Beamish had never supposed herself to be capable of, she repeated her remark. She had been talking incessantly, and rather well, during the whole of that curious half an hour, saying nice things about the sky and the stars, the view, the intermittent sound of music, the cleanliness of the breeze, the beauty of the yacht, and had paused in her latest outburst of ecstasy, so natural, so naïve and so spontaneous, and waited once more for some sort of answer from the tall, wiry, drait man who had so much money and was still delightfully young and whose wife was living through a period

that was very trying to a husband, — a man who had looked at her hitherto with eyes that failed to focus. Perfectly reasonable, but judging from former experiences, not likely to last very much longer, — unless she had completely lost her touch.

“Is that so,” replied Pelham, who ought to have said, “Yes, indeed,” if he had been listening. But with enormous strides and a cap pulled down over his nose he was in reality covering the floor of the bedroom at home, admiring the effect of the light on Beatrix’s delicious fair hair.

“I have never been on a yacht like yours before. It’s rather like a young liner, isn’t it? How wonderful to have money and know how to spend it.” She heaved one of those poverty sighs which had eased the pressure of things most satisfactorily on other occasions, and was obliged almost to run to keep up with him.

“I don’t think it’ll last,” said Pelham, taking a chance at her talking about the weather. Most women did. If the baby was a boy, and Beatrix got over it, he’d knock off smoking by about a dozen pipes a day by way of thanksgiving. A man could hardly do more.

Having been brought up on a good golf links, Mrs. Beamish preferred things to be a little difficult and even liked undoubted rough in its proper place. She was not one of those occasional players who resented bunkers, either. She was very able with a niblick. But this was hardly golf. “It was a deadly dull crossing,” she went on, nevertheless, although considerably out of breath. “I was all alone, you see. There were stacks of men coming over to enquire into conditions, but they looked like it and prepared for

prohibition, which luckily kept them out of sight. I don't like women. One can be as lonely on a crowded *Aquitania* as on Fifth Avenue, or the middle of Piccadilly. But, after all, I suppose, it's a moral tonic to be completely and absolutely unhappy once in a way. Don't you think so? "

But even that didn't work. This man said "Yes" when he should have said "No," and "Is that so?" when he should have said "I don't agree with you," and he raced up and down, consistently profile, with his hands buried in his pockets and a brain which should have become susceptible to a very charming young woman who had worked extremely hard altogether in the possession of a wife who was no use to him under the circumstances. It was quite, yes, quite, unbelievable. And so she fell out and leaned on the rail, achieving an attitude of forlornness which few artists could have arranged so perfectly.

And after Pelham had passed and re-passed a dozen times in the belief that she was still trotting pluckily at his heels, the Lord only knew why, and she heard him continue to say "yes" and "no" and "is that so" because that was what was apparently required of him, a sense of humor came to her rescue as it usually did. She burst out laughing, gave it all up for the time being and went in to the now deserted smoking room. Her kind and trusting bear leader had gone to bed. And so, obviously, had Malcolm Fraser, who meant nothing in her young life, being a poor poet. And here, protected from the wind that she detested and the faint but persistent band which made sounds that were as far from being melody as an attack on an iron-monger's shop by a band of hooli-

gans, she lighted a cigarette and lay full stretch on the settee, exposing a yard of very charming leg.

When Elizabeth McKenzie told Pelham that her protégée was the daughter of an Oxford Don and an actress she was not strictly accurate. She was always several degrees from due North. May Beamish was, as a matter of fact, the youngest of the nine children of the Rev. Almeric Spencer Chesham, Rector of a little place sixteen miles from Oxford, and of his wife Lillith, a once beautiful but inveterately lazy and "Oh, I can't be bothered" woman. Hence this overwhelming family and the subsequent crushing poverty of the poor man whose devotion to the Church had been daily undermined by the spectre of the butcher's bill. Like all such women Mrs. Chesham laid down the blame for her disproportionate family to providence instead of to improvidence, and posed so often as one of the few remaining specimens of the perfect mother woman that she grew to believe it herself. In so far as that went, therefore, she was an actress, but in no other way. To the most sympathetic and child-loving person it will be easy then to understand that little May, the last and smallest of this brood, found her parents too poor and too blasé to give her more attention than was legally required. She came through her infancy with so tenacious a grip on life that all neglect was overcome. Death, who came within an ace of claiming her a dozen times, eventually gave her up in despair. At the fag end of this harum-scarum family the poor little thing was like the battered bow at the tail of a kite. From childhood she inherited the gar-

ments which had descended through four sisters from the eldest. In the general scramble for food she, like a small pig, remained on the outside until everything had gone but the bones, overlooked, undernourished, and regarded by the whole family as unintended, her struggle to remain alive was beautiful in its courage and optimism and quite extraordinary in its humor. Born in May, and so named, there was much in her character that belonged to that intrepid month. She insisted on growing up and making a place for herself, and all the while she invested her broken toys and fifth-hand clothes with the perfection of a strong imagination, as a gutter-snipe turns a park pond into the sea. Before she was old enough to be let out alone she tramped several miles daily to a cheap and insalubrious school, frequently winning a ride back in a baker's cart on her reputation for neglect. Tiny though she was and remained she developed the physique of a ballet dancer and the cold grit of a tight-rope walker, and when, at seventeen, with the capacity, created by a long apprenticeship to adversity, to make a gleam of sunshine into a fine day she was taken to London as companion to an aunt. She said goodbye to the almost bankrupt rectory with the determination to make someone bring her dreams of great affluence into actuality. Her story of mended skirts and patched stockings, an attic bedroom and broken toys, must be changed into one of silks and diamonds by the sale of her face. This, her only asset, had become irresistibly pretty in a flower-like way, and it was admirably enhanced by a charming and perfectly balanced little body. In the tidy, efficient care of her father's widowed sister, who had been left a house in an almost fashionable part of London with sufficient money to

keep it up by the exercise of much ingenuity in the dodging of income tax, the Cinderella of Little Beddington turned herself into a personality. Her hair was bobbed, her freckles were removed, her nails were manicured. The summer sales provided her with what was indeed a magic wardrobe and for the first time in her life she slept in linen sheets. In return for all these benefits she made companionship a fine art and proved to an often disillusioned aunt that gratitude still existed. The hardy weed of the rectory garden blossomed into a very perfect specimen of the sweet pea.

Then came the war, which released the four Chesham boys from their office stools and sent them rejoicing into the open. To them, as to so many thousands of their class who were prevented by the poverty of their parents from making a profession of the Army or the Navy, the great catastrophe was a godsend. They took to uniforms like ducks to water and became good officers in the twinkling of an eye. Most of them paid a high price for their joy in death and wounds, and in the winnowing of youth Charlie Chesham and Dick went down. Harry lost his left arm and Almeric both eyes. Of the five girls two were married, with children, and their husbands obtained cushy jobs in Whitehall by pulling strings. Two others went as soon as it was possible into the Motor Service and greatly distinguished themselves. May was too young and too small to pass through the barriers of red tape and remained with her aunt. It so happened that among the boys who had begun to flutter round her like moths about a candle was Valentine Beamish, and it was at him rather than at any of the others that May had been shooting her most

seductive eyes. He was not so good-looking as Nicholas Ingraham or that brilliant young barrister Reggie Barlow who had sworn to achieve the wool-sack and inevitably would have done so, being unscrupulous, but for the German bullet that bore his name. But his father was then a rich man, owner of the B. B. Steamship Company, whose fleet carried merchandise to every port of the world, and Valentine, for all that his nose was crooked, would be able to compensate for seventeen years of that hugger-mugger rectory, that swarm of brothers and sisters, the flattened-out clergyman who regretted that he had not become a priest and the hairpin-dropping mother who had spent her life in lying about the house and going from one accidental event to another with the regularity of the seasons. Very young before the war, Valentine had entertained no wild ideas of early marriage and merely included the pretty May among the many girls to be flirted with. He had been commissioned in the Royal Naval Air Service, had picked up his job as best he could, flown an antiquated bus at Gallipoli, and spent the inevitable period in hospital being put together again for further exploits. During his convalescence he had stayed with the aunt in Rutland Gate, received the mixture of adoration and captivation from the most unusual girl whom he had never been able to kiss, caught the deadly cocci of khaki ecstasy that had led to so many hasty and mistaken marriages and carried May off to St. Mary Abbot's in a taxicab two days before he reported for service again.

For several months the well-satisfied bride beamed upon her friends. Yes, thank you. Her husband was the son of the B.B.S.C. of which everybody knew.

As soon as the silly old war was over she was going to look at houses in Grosvenor Square and spend all her afternoons in and about Bond Street getting, oh my dear, such heavenly things to wear. She was going to buy one of the really old places in the country, hunt, race, collect china and prints and eventually see to it that her esteemed father-in-law, whom she had never met, bought a peerage from the ever-obliging Government so that, in the natural course of things, she would be addressed as her Ladyship by first, second and third footmen in the manner of the green-eyed coral-haired sirens in the naïve works of Elinor Glyn, upon which she had built up so many of her adolescent dreams. But the war — which destroyed so many reputations, upset so many calculations, and revolutionized all old shibboleths put a rough foot upon her perfectly natural reaction from poverty and neglect. Those of the ships of the B.B.S.C. that were not caught in the enemy ports and sunk by enemy submarines became rusty and barnacle-covered wherever they were permitted to lie by the much worried Admiralty, with the result that Papa Beamish went headlong into bankruptcy and Valentine, with nothing but his pay, stood perpetually overdrawn at Cox's Bank, which grew fat and autocratic on the war. And for five long and dreadful years May, among the wreckage of her dreams, continued to companion a nerve-shaken aunt whose income dwindled steadily as taxation and the cost of living mounted higher and higher. Faced with unemployment and empty pockets whenever he got out of uniform, the gallant Valentine, who had become before the Armistice a Major in the R.F.C. with a double row of ribbons on his much-improved chest, re-

mained in the service and was used by a more and more bewildered and blundering Government in the various places in which to oblige the ubiquitous Mr. Churchill they maintained an army, and found himself in 1922 in a one-eyed spot in Ulster, watching the inevitable family squabble of the advertising Irish who, having terrorized Mr. Lloyd George into giving them all that they demanded were proceeding with the utmost satisfaction to reduce their once prosperous country to ruin and chaos. And then, during the brief and glorious heat-wave of the spring, the patriotic Aunt Augusta wrote her weekly letter to the editor of the Post and went off in a fit of anger and humiliation to a well-deserved rest. She was buried in the weed-covered churchyard at Little Beddington by her sorrowful and affectionate niece within a stone's throw of the modest slab beneath which reposed the earthly remains of The Rev. Almeric Spencer Chesham and Lillith, his can't-be-bothered spouse. The former had died of intense regret and the latter without a struggle, and after the rapacious Government had helped itself copiously to Aunt Augusta's leavings May became possessed of fifteen hundred pounds. Still looking seventeen in a favorable light and clever make-up, May had, by this time, achieved the ripe old age of twenty-six. The persistent optimism and the sense of humor acquired during her Rectory years had brought this girl successfully through the crisis of the war and her unproductive marriage. But with the harborage of the house in Rutland Gate no longer hers to enjoy and the duty of companionship no longer hers to perform, something had to be done.

Examining herself carefully in the glass, May came to the conclusion that she could do better for herself

than live with the lights turned down on half the pay of a Flying Corps Major, which might cease at any moment. She must join the enormous ranks of working women and endeavor with her small nest egg, to insure a silk-lined future. At twenty-six there was little time to lose. And so, after an expensive rest cure at the Metropole Hotel of exactly one week, she wrote a long, cool, kind and practical letter to the husband whom she had rarely seen, asked him to be ready to provide her with a divorce upon receipt of a cable and announced her intention of sailing to America.

"'Twill be better for us both, dear boy," she wrote. "Through no fault of yours our marriage has failed, and if I can wangle an engagement that will give me all I want, at last you will be free to spend whatever you can earn all upon yourself. I feel the need more and more of becoming very expensive and I hate to think of putting you further into debt. And when the War Office bungs you a chit to say that your services are no longer required I don't want to be a load on your shoulders while you grub along until the next war. All I hope is that you won't have to rattle a box in Cockspur Street. If I have any luck it goes without saying that you can touch me for a bit. All the gold of the world is in America and as divorce is the national habit and married men are very susceptible to my unusual type I don't think I shall be adventuring very long. I am off on the *Aquitania* next week and will write a chatty note from time to time. Goodbye, dear boy. Here's all the luck in the world from your affectionate and grateful Kitten."

She wrote this frankly and without reserve because she knew, better than anyone, that Valentine, rackety

as he was when he got the chance, was absolutely trustworthy. He was, indeed, a man for whose reckless bravery and sportsmanship she had a great respect. She was proud of him, too, and but for the collapse of his father's business would have made him a good little wife. But all her sixteen early years demanded compensation, and the longer such compensation was delayed the greater became her obsession to achieve it. It had become a fixed idea. It amounted almost to fanaticism, like the desire to discover the North Pole or communicate with Mars. She told herself that she had earned the right to something more than comfort and she was ready, with all the grit, courage and humor that she had been forced to acquire, to achieve her ambition, by hook or by crook.

Hence, having learned all about Pelham from her new friend, her presence on the *Galatea*.

Poor old Pelham!

IV

BUT it was not until the third day out, when Malcolm and Mrs. McKenzie had gone ashore, that May Beamish made any headway in her scheme to catch this temporarily wifeless man on the rebound, — generally an easy thing to any young woman with a pretty face and neat ankles. All in white but with a geranium tie and stockings she took possession of Pelham's favorite chair in the sun forward and waited for him to come along to sleep. And, when he came, she rose with a little cry of fright, certain that he would be

shamed into asking her to stay where she was, but quite uncertain as to whether he would be sufficiently unpossessed of Beatrix for once to draw a chair to her side. Whether the geranium tie and stockings had anything to do with it or whether they hadn't is open to argument. The fact remained that Pelham fell to her trick and drew up a chair. Excellent.

"You must be lonely," he said, suffering severely from that complaint.

She smiled to convey the idea that that was nothing new and touched his arm with the tip of a finger. "I'm awfully sorry," she said simply, "and I quite understand," and then immediately became impersonal, almost like a man. But she could see that she had touched the vox humana stop of the Pelham instrument for the first time and warmed to further work. Here was a man who was as young as and even younger in regard to women than the pre-war Nicholas Ingraham and all the other boys who had come to the house in Rutland Gate. Little crosses in France marked most of their places now. For several minutes she talked quietly, using unexuberant words, about wind and weather, Malcolm Fraser and the dear good lady who had been so kind. But she crossed her legs in a way that permitted the unconscious display of a small round knee, one of the neatest things that she did.

Sulking was not one of Pelham's characteristics. He had forced himself into an attitude of aloofness out of loyalty to his wife and as a sort of punishment for his unrestraint at home. Four days on the water with only a mental picture of the precious girl with her feet on a chair had steadied his nerves. From the perspective of the *Galatea* the act of having a baby

seemed far less disastrous and original, and Aunt Honoria's daily reports over the telephone which he dashed ashore to receive had sent him back increasingly normal and confident. Then, too, the sun was warmer and the ice had gone out of the wind. There was color on the earth once more. The man who says that weather makes no difference to his life doesn't know what living is. He had been monosyllabic and ungracious to his cousin and her friend. Dash it, he must begin to make up for his bad behavior, especially to the friend. He must remember that her bridge had been good, her manner deliciously quiet, her occasional laughter musical, her demands for attention nil. And now she showed herself, with a nice economy of words, to be possessed of the sympathy that he needed and the understanding that made apology unnecessary. The knee was charming too. Come. It was not such a bad old world.

And so he loaded a pipe and talked with the sun on his face. And for a very pleasant hour she let him talk, drawing him out on what she had taken the trouble to discover were his pet subjects and leading him to believe, by warm eyes and little bursts of mirth, that he was talking well. Then, finally, when she had made him feel completely at home with her and extremely pleased with himself, she led him gently into personalities and lied about her life. Or rather she roughed out her story with so cunning a touch of romance that she made him see that she was in reality far more in need of sympathy than he had ever been, which helped him to his feet. Convalescence is always easier when an invalid is shown that a fellow sufferer has been nearer to death than himself.

She gave him to understand, though with none of

the slimy spirit of martyrdom, that she had slipped into an unfortunate marriage after a most unhappy childhood. She painted an amusing though undelectable picture of the Rectory and its inmates, of her rescue by the Aunt, of the London house and its boys, of the bombshell of the war and her visit to the Church. She made out that under such conditions, at seventeen, a patriotic girl, too young to serve, could do no less than give herself to a gallant flying man as a contribution to the cause. And when she came to grass-widowhood, the death of her protector, and her recent ejection from the safety of Rutland Gate to the draughtiness of the wide, wide world, her choice of colors was very deft and she left the ineffaceable impression of herself as an almost innocent child-wife, deserted by a brave but pre-occupied husband, at the mercy of Fate. "And but for dear Mrs. McKenzie," she said, bringing her story to the end of its current instalment with a smile on her trembling lips, "I haven't a friend on earth."

"There you're wrong," said Pelham, as she knew that he would. "You have a friend in me."

After which it didn't matter in the very least that the others returned to the yacht.

V

BUT when, at the end of another week, this little working girl read over the careful entries in her secretly written diary, there was very little in them to build great hopes upon.

Through them all there ran a note of astonishment and failure. Was there ever such a man? *"I stood close to him on deck to-night with the moonlight in my hair. We had been alone for an hour and I had never talked so well. But when I had brought everything up and up to the moment which in a dozen other episodes always ended with a kiss,—midnight, a multitude of stars, a sailing moon, the rattle of sex—he swung into a story of a tiger hunt and then said 'time for bed.'"*

And another. *"Inseparable all day. Launch in the morning to shore. A round of golf on a deserted course. Back to a merry meal with the long-tongued Mrs. McK. and the simple soul in goggles. Deck chairs in the sun, the others writing notes. Confidences and further pictures of early girlish trials, fourth wall cunningly unbricked, a nice display of leg. A snore. The man asleep. Man? What is the word?"*

And yet another. *"All day in cabin. Headache, with the object of being missed. An appearance in the afternoon, nicely pale and depressed. Transparent frock against the sun—utterly unappreciated. Welcome brotherly but brief. Deck tennis with M.F. preferred to sitting with me. Mrs. McK. on the German mark instead. Bridge after dinner. Might just as well have been a boy."*

This one, too. *"Bathed from boat. Both men with me. Skin-tight costume. Exhausted halfway back. Rescued and warmed from faint. But not a flicker of an eye."*

And this. *"Reconstructions. Sex appeal and the old old tricks to be discarded. He is armoured in loyalty. Tactics in future, friendship and trust. A*

girl of supreme courage fighting her way. Humour and grit the keynote. Not hardened and cynical from early sufferings and unhappy marriage, but optimistic with belief in human nature. Establish the sort of mannish relations that will make it easy to ask for money help. That, bar a turn of luck, a rift within the lute, all that can be achieved."

Finally, the summing up, shrewd and well observed. *"A sportsman, married for love. A married bachelor in a barbed-wire fence. Kind, sympathetic, generous, impatient, hates grouching. Supremely satisfied with one woman, unlike every other man. As a companion, delightful but elusive. As a playfellow, workmanlike but infrequent. Knows beasts and fishes backwards but women not at all. Probably the reincarnation of Robinson Crusoe, with Malcolm Fraser as Man Friday. A man's man. Would be in his element in war or on a desert island. He likes me when I laugh, leaves me when I cry, ignores me when I snuggle. I have never met his sort before. Damn."*

Well, there it was. It was good, at any rate, to know exactly where she stood and what the trip was worth. "You have a friend in me," and that was true. Astonishment, of course. Think of Valentine, and the boys who buzzed round Rutland Gate. But failure, only in so far as the common methods of those easy days were utterly without appeal. The luxury of the *Galatea* was something that she had never enjoyed before. "Make the best of every minute of it, old thing," she told herself, "and be content with what you've done. If you can't catch Pelham Franklin when his wife is going to have a baby, at any rate you can establish banking relations and win a letter of credit."

And with that alternative still to be clinched, Mrs.

Valentine Beamish arranged herself in a more cousinly juxtaposition to Pelham's chair. It had given her the shock of her short experienced life not to have been able to bring a married man to the kissing point with all her well-done tricks.

VI

"I THINK I will," said Malcolm and filled his glass again. A cigar went better on that particular Cognac than anything he knew.

The owner of the *Galatea*, wearing a beautiful tan, lit a post-lunch pipe. "The soothing lull of water out of earshot of the earth," he said, remembering a line from his friend's most recent effort.

Which pleased him very much. There are few thrills greater to a maker of words than the quotation of them at a fitting moment. He took a low, deep chair that caught the small of the back. There was not a thing that called. "Gorgeous, unbelievable," he said, seizing a chance to let himself go as a poet sometimes must. "Ten days ago, before I came aboard this planet. . . ."

"Ten days! Good Lord."

"I'd been standing among the hideous sensations of a world at peace. Every edition of the paper rejoiced in making them worse. The self-governing Irish were cutting their brothers' throats. France, playing Shylock on the European stage, was demanding her pound of flesh from the bony German bosom, and England, at the mercy of Lloyd George, was

watching her self-made President hand Russia to the Huns."

Oh, well, there was nothing to be done but lie back and let him work it off.

"Not a cable from any part of the world that didn't contain a strike, bloodshed, the fear of ruin, the demand for a larger air-force, the poison of the Bolsheviks, the pathos of new conferences, the grumbles of Kings in exile, the rattle of unemployed cash boxes, the seditious stretchings of everybody's notions, and the movements of the Four Horsemen still riding over the earth. From every country, over every wire, the same old story of Prime Minister Canutes trembling on the edge of rising tides. . . . And then, what? Isolation on this floating star, the world forgetting by the world forgot."

"A drug," said Pelham, getting suddenly to his feet. He didn't give a hang for all the worries of the world. There was Beatrix, his girl, moving nearer and nearer to the crisis in which he couldn't help. To-morrow, the next day, any time, the call might come from her to carry him headlong back to land and reality, to stand and wait in fear.

In his desire to indulge in a riot of phrases in order to keep his brain oiled, Malcolm, kindest of men, had failed to look forward, for once, to the possibility of reminding his friend of the trouble that hung over his head. And all these days he had been conspiring with Mrs. McKenzie to talk of everyone but Beatrix. Fool! Idiot! Juggler with words. Now he must yank old Pelham back to normal ground again. "No, not a drug, old boy. A tonic. A holiday. Something that will make us able to dive into the whirlpool better able to swim."

"I hope you're right," said Pelham. "The whole ten days have been a nightmare. I'd a damn sight rather have remained at home."

"Is that grateful? Haven't we all done our best to give you peace of mind?"

"Yes, but if you think that's possible you have a quaint idea of me."

It was no good to argue the point. Malcolm knew perfectly well what Pelham had been through after a quick relapse. He had heard him pacing the deck at night, had watched him, with brotherly pride, control himself to conform. The trip had done nothing but clap a lid on a volcano. He, too, had suffered, loving the girl at home. But she, at any rate, had been left to concentrate. He reminded Pelham of this and won a nod of agreement. And having smoothed things down again went off at a tangent, quick.

"Tell me about May Beamish."

"Is there anything to tell? You know as much about her as I do."

"No, I don't. She never talks to me."

"She hasn't talked much to me either, as far as I remember. I make her out to be a very good sort though. Sensible and as straight as a line. Had a pretty rotten deal one way and another. Large family and a struggling father and finally a war marriage. She's all right. Great courage and laughs a lot. I back her to get through. I like her. We're excellent friends. I shall ask Beatrix to be kind."

Which confirmed Malcolm in his belief that she was a very clever girl. A simple soul, himself, and easily taken in, he had had no suspicions of her plan, no remote idea that she was ruthlessly set upon self-preservation. But he had watched her rather closely

because of Mrs. McKenzie's statement of her power to whistle every man to her heel. And he had seen her instant realization that the display of stockings was lost on Pelham. He had caught her blank amazement, too, when, after the episode of the rescue from drowning, in which somehow he didn't believe, — she swam like a fish, — Pelham's muscular massage had left him cold. That expression had stuck. . . . Um. Decidedly clever, that girl. But he doubted whether Beatrix would be kind!

And as they went on deck a motor boat left shore, and headed for the yacht. A telegraph boy was aboard. Was this the call, at last?

"*Galatea?*"

"Yes."

"Pelham Franklin?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"Wire."

With one foot on the boat the man whose heart had jumped into his mouth, read the message, looked up at Malcolm with lips gone white, gave an order, and sat beside the boy who was the messenger of fate.

Voices and the splurge of water brought Mrs. McKenzie to the rail. "Ah," she said. "To boy or not to boy, that is the question. . . . Look. The dear old thing has actually gone away without his hat."

Alone, forward, with her hand on Pelham's chair, the girl who was sensible and as straight as a line watched the passing of the man who hadn't fallen. "I don't mind his not waving his hand," she said to herself, "so long as he'll be free with his cheques."

And for a long time Malcolm Fraser remained where he had been left, staring at the sun-bathed quay on which his friend had landed, his whole heart filled

with prayer. He had loved Beatrix long before Pelham had known her, — poor devil of a poet in goggles.

VII

“I SENT for the doctor two hours ago,” Aunt Honoria said, “and my telegram at the same time. I promised you that . . . steady, my son.”

“Oh, rather,” said Pelham, “steady as a rock,” though he felt that his teeth were chattering. He must get to his room, in the dark.

“You will dine, of course?”

“Yes. That is, no. I’ve had all the dinner I want.” (Oh, please go!)

“Well, then, I shall wait in the drawing-room, Pel. If you feel the need to talk . . .”

“Thanks most awfully, yes.” Had she any more to say? Couldn’t she see that like an ill dog he wanted to hide himself out of sight?

But it was too great a moment in family history to leave undramatized. And even Aunt Honoria became just woman in her emotion. Beatrix might have been hers.

“Don’t lock the door of your room,” she said. “I may have to ask you to help.”

“Ready at any time. Come along whenever you feel like it.”

And for a moment they stood facing each other, polite and smiling and calm. Then the crack, the quick

human movement of both, the white head against the broad shoulder.

“ Oh, my little girl! ”

“ Oh, my God! ”

And so he didn't lock his door. With the snow of the moon on the window sills he marched those hours away; up one side of his den and across, down the other side and across; routine unvaried, like that of the sentinel whose enemy was Death. On all the network of lines laid down by a love-made imagination his brain went off, at a rush. All but one of them led to the room upstairs, through what she had given to him and what he might have given to her; through places marked with happiness, misunderstanding, forgiveness; through junctions of wounded vanity, laughter, and unforgettable joy. But there was one that led beyond, through heartbreak to a grave. . . . At that he stood for a moment, cold and dumb, and went down on his knees. Oh, God, who looks down on little people, let him keep his wife. If she were taken how could he repay?

And when, with a feeling of great kindness on his shoulder, he got upon his feet, he left the darkness of that room, the silence of that gravestone, the selfishness of that suffering and went into the woman who might have to ask his help.

High of chin and straight of back she held out her hand as he came. “ Thank you,” she said, “ for remembering an old woman.”

But it was she who had to be thanked. Women are braver than men.

And so, in mutual help, they passed the rest of the time together, talking quietly as though they were

waiting for Beatrix to come back from the town, rising when finally the door was thrown back, both unable to speak.

“ Good morning. Fine boy.”

PART III

I

MALCOLM FRASER was in the mood for rain.

Not because he was a man with a garden and in sympathy with vegetables, or one who went in for ducks and owned a dried-up pond. Not because he had felt impelled to invite two of his hostesses to tea and hoped a disgusting outburst of the clouds would make them let him off. But for the far more human reason that his brain had turned to mud, and not a single line of all his concentration had come out right.

He had slept well, too; had received a check for the enormous sum of sixty-eight dollars from the publishers of his last collection of poems and had read a clipping from one of the Book Reviews in which he was referred to as a singer of mellifluous rhymes by a man whose verse had achieved the yearly fame of Christmas cards. Such is criticism! Also he had gone to work with the temporary optimism of one who had exercised sufficient self-restraint to leave his paper on the outside of the door, so that he had not been crushed beneath the falling mark, or smothered under the daily deluge of broken promises.

All about him in his den were his small familiar gods, — prints in the few spaces unoccupied by books, quaint pieces of china picked up in places just as quaint, and all the other things that gather round a man on his way through life whose eye responds to

color and sympathies to age and who rattles in his pocket a surplus of small coins. For further companionship a droll green parrot of uncertain years who restrained himself to silence when his master was working, though at other times, and especially at the sight of strange faces, ran rapidly through a repertoire of cat music and pre-Prohibition sounds, bars of the comic songs of early '90 vintage and all too life-like imitations of chauffeurs with catarrh. . . . The enormous surprise that he conveyed in his way of saying "Wow!" may have been engendered from having sat so long in a window that overlooked the main door of the Algonquin. His interest in the arrival of dramatic critics to lunch remained as keen as ever. For one or two of the actresses of the younger school he had devised a special greeting. When the window was open during the summer months he was coached into a vocabulary of Irish porter words that caused a havoc of laughter among Malcolm's visiting friends. The beast—he was more than a bird—was worth his weight in gold.

But the day was one of those that almost make the use of wine unnecessary in New York. A blue and cloudless sky, a breeze that came from Bowling Green filled with flecks of spray, and an exhilaration that sent the City's spirits up to the water tanks of its highest buildings like floating scraps of paper. Rain failing altogether the poet with the fruitless pen welcomed the sudden jangle of the telephone bell which completed the morning's ruin.

It was Pelham Franklin calling up from home.

"Come down this afternoon? You bet your life I will. No, I won't forget to ram pyjamas in a bag or a tooth brush either. You've sent a car to town?"

Fine. Mine's gone phut at last. You've saved my life, old boy. I was on the verge of cutting my throat. Now I think I'll chuck writing and live on writers. My love to Beatrix and a million thanks."

Why slave at writing small mellifluous songs when he was asked to be a part of a living poem? Why force himself to sit for lonely hours in a bachelor apartment house when he was asked to stretch his soul in the country and welcome back to active life the girl whose convalescence was at an end? "We must have you here for the great day," Pelham had said, making the wire tingle with excitement. "It's to-morrow. Beatrix comes down again to-morrow. Drop everything and come. To-night we'll talk things over and you shall see the boy."

The boy, — *her* boy! . . . He'd have to steel himself to that.

He ripped the half-covered page from its block and chucked it under his desk. Death and the great hereafter when there were life and love? Who had doomed him to be a poet in any case, when he might have been a golf-pro? Had his mother felt assured that he was to be born with an ugly face and without the gift of making money and given him the kink of singing words to compensate for the loss of love? A man must have cash as well as good looks to get the modern girl for a wife; though cash by itself is often enough.

And as he put his things in a bag and ate the lunch that he had ordered up, and buttered a collar instead of a roll and put in a knife instead of a razor, stalking from den to bedroom and thanking his stars for the chance to escape, the parrot became as mad as he, opening bottles of champagne one after another, let-

ting Apollinaris burst all over the floor, oozing out the corks of heavy port and fizzing soda water into a glass. Not content with this relief from well-trained silence he gave a recital of a cat fight that would have made the fortune of a variety artist.

Fed up with the Muse, himself and the parrot, Malcolm needed to talk. So he took the seat by the chauffeur instead of riding alone. Though born in Brooklyn and never once nearer to Ireland than Boston it was this man who did the talking, and amazing stuff it was. More Irish than the Irish he held forth all the way, murdering England, shooting up Ulster, cursing Collins and crowning de Valera with a wreath of thorns. It was only by a series of flukes that the car remained on the road. But it was vastly interesting to Malcolm after three weeks of imprisonment, and it made him ask himself, once more, how sanity could ever come back to the world. This man and millions like him had the vote.

The country behind the advertising boards was very green and gay. Long before Greenwich came into view Malcolm had learnt by heart the fact that Barrie's latest picture had been re-named and re-constructed by the Master of Movie men. Shaking off the road's illustrations and the frequency of Fords, they found themselves at last, with relief, among long stretches of uninterrupted hills and hollows, woods, farms, golf courses and meadows sprinkled with wild flowers. Then, finally, quiet houses among lilacs, — and peace. And when they turned into the avenue which led to Pelham's place they saw that April had gone over the hill and May was middle-aged. And Malcolm asked himself why the devil he struggled to compete with the greatest of poets, why he endeavored to interpret

the soul and spirit of Nature when she did it so well herself. For sixty-eight dollars from his publishers and a line in a book review?

But he was beyond depression now and thirty-two miles from his ink-well. Here was poetry and here was friendship and upstairs in that charming house was the girl no man could deny him the right to love as long as there was loving. To-morrow, the great day, he would give her welcome, slim and eager, to a new beginning . . . and see the boy.

II

"TEA in my den," said Pelham, and headed for it, with his arm round Malcolm's shoulder. They had camped together and sailed together, been in the same tight places, shared a mutual purse, sworn to the same code, discovered and held to the same beliefs and emerged in brotherhood. There was no envy in Malcolm's heart because Beatrix was the wife of his friend. She loved him. Therefore Pelham was the better man.

And once in the chair that he had owned for years, Malcolm forgot his loneliness and the bad morning and rhymes. In this room and house he had the sense of belonging, of being attached. How good that was! "Now tell me about her," he said . . . "and the boy."

"Beatrix first," replied Pelham. "You shall see the boy and judge." The parental grin was all over his face, wonderful to behold. Lemon, two lumps and

no water. No need to ask about that. "Well, it's to-morrow. . . . God, how long I've waited! Months, years almost. I've been a lodger in life all the time. A big price to pay for a bit of a boy, I thought, until he caught hold of my finger. By George, what a grip and what an eye for a gun. And the way he knows me and chortles. But, as I said, you shall see for yourself. Prepare to be amazed. . . . Well, it's to-morrow." And being no poet he left it like that.

And being a poet and a lover in dreams, Malcolm knew all the rest, by heart.

Very handy, tea. There is so commonplace a rattle of spoon against cup and something so fat and ordinary about a china pot. A proper tea drinker would as soon be shot as pour it from silver. And as to muffins, whoever supposed that they have feelings? Cold, yes, perhaps, of neglect.

"I try to make mine like this," said Malcolm. "But I'm frightfully undomestic."

And somehow Pelham laughed. Who knew as well that wool-gathering old beggar sitting, be-goggled, in muddle and symbols, ink-stained and drinking tannin, and his priceless gift of finding a tangent that led straight away from too emotional lines?

Malcolm had worked for that laugh and stuck it in his button-hole like the order of the Elks. He had seen Pelham at the time when Beatrix had brought him down to his knees at her feet. He had watched him under the inarticulate excitement of the ceremony that had taken place in a shabby registrar's office. He had read the meaning of his restlessness and fear during the recent days and nights on the *Galatea*. Here was the bridegroom again, but with this difference. To the hunger of love and desire there were added

now the admiration, respect and inexpressible gratitude for the courage of his wife and the deed that she had done — to him, as to all right fathers of a first child, the greatest of deeds. There was no need for him to tell. Here, too, was the man of one great love, fit and hard and sun-tanned, proud of that boy to the full extent of pride; the very simple outdoor man whose face was marked with suffering and pain and whose soul was tempered like the fine steel of a sword by the anguish of an exquisite sympathy. Not the same Pelham of the days of unattachment, killing time without a cause. Not the man without responsibility going from selfishness to selfishness. But one who had found the key to life — an enviable man, because it was an elusive key to most.

And he went on, assisted by a pipe. He had been bottled up so long. “Beatrix has made a good recovery. The doctor insisted on keeping her very quiet and so she’s been barb-wired off from everyone except the boy, Aunt Honoria and the old brown hen. I’ve been let in, of course. Of course, the family is waiting for to-morrow, when it’s coming to lunch and all that. Books have been sent down by the ton. I said that I’ve been let in, but somehow, — I dunno, one or other of the nurses stood about and I got in the way of the doctor and Brownie fussed and fussed. She always resented me. And also there has been, which I don’t understand, a sort of formality, a sort of shyness . . . and something in her smile. . . . Well, it’s to-morrow. Then I’ll find out. I don’t think I’ve done anything. I’ve tried to think. It’s just convalescence I take it and the little strangeness. Yes, that’s it. And what Beatrix calls dramatizing, — working it all up. But there’s been something in her smile. . . .”

And he got up and stood gazing at the china teapot, like a puzzled stork. He had said more than he had intended, even to Malcolm, but he had got it off his chest.

And so Malcolm, knowing that he must give an answer, put himself in Beatrix's place. It wasn't easy, even for a poet. But, after all, hadn't *she* provided the answer? "It's a sense of humor and love of mischief," he said. "It makes her dramatize, — she told you so. And shyness, very natural, becomes formality, in a sort of way. Wasn't there just the same thing in her smile when I left you both on the *Galatea* for the honeymoon? Think back."

Wheeling round, with all his puzzlement lifted, Pelham nodded. "Just," he said. "You're right. Good. Where the hell would I be without you?" He looked a new man.

A lot they knew about women, these two.

Or babies.

A woman wheeled a perambulator past the windows, — a woman with a face as hard and unresponsive as that of one of the lions that keep people out of public buildings. One to whom a new-born child means no more than another certainty of bed, board and wages; not a possible genius in embryo, a great inventor, a master crook, the saviour of his race, or an addition to the large army of mere citizens and ratepayers; not even the concrete expression of love, unlike anything else of the kind, of a character, a beauty, a wonder exclusively its own to the man and woman to whom it belonged. In fact, a nurse.

"Come on out and see the boy," said Pelham, with the parental grin again.

And when Malcolm, on the very verge of a jealousy

that he'd never known before, followed out and through the hall and round the front of the house, he stood at the side of that little sleeping thing never so much the poor devil of a poet in goggles. There was a needle running through and through his heart.

"Doesn't he sleep like nothing you ever saw? Did you ever see such a nose and a chin as firm? Wonderful little chap. I'd wake him so that you could see his eyes, — really extraordinary, Mal — but he tries to say so much when he's awake that he must get all the rest he can. To-morrow you shall be introduced. He's got to know his father's oldest pal. Ssh! Not so loud!"

But Malcolm hadn't stirred a finger or said a word. Only one great cry had echoed through his soul. "Beatrix, — oh, my love."

III

LIKE all husbands Pelham was completely happy only when his wife's relations were enjoying themselves at least a hundred miles away from his house. A man, after all, never promises to love, honor and obey his mother-in-law, or with all his worldly goods to endow his wife's father, brothers and sisters, uncles, aunts and cousins. In the history of every marriage the coping-stone of dissension is laid invariably by the subtle interference of those who, naturally enough, take sides against the husband and endeavor, probably with the best intentions, to teach the wife the way to run her home. A wise husband, who must be,

therefore, a strong man and tactful, establishes at once a golden rule in regard to his in-laws. He gives his wife carte blanche to entertain them at lunch and dinner, but he puts his foot down, and keeps it there, on every hint to spend the night. One night, with its morning list of reconstruction, and the coping-stone arrives. There is always the same old story of bathroom towels and pillow cases, the wrong way of making toast and coffee, of dusting stairs and answering telephones. It has never yet been truthfully owned that the serpent in the garden of Eden was Eve's maternal parent.

When Pelham said to Malcolm that the family was waiting for to-morrow and coming to lunch and all that, there was, it must be confessed, a slight shudder of impatience and resentment in the tail of that statement. "All that," embraced, of course, the inevitable fuss and excitement and wreckage of peace that would accompany Mr. and Mrs. Vanderdyke, and the Major, especially under the circumstances. A fine boy meant to them the fulfilment of the last of their ambitions. With this he was in the most complete sympathy and would delight in showing off the greatest invention the world had ever seen. But being himself in a high state of emotion he would have preferred to welcome the return of Beatrix to daily life in private, with only Malcolm present. Aunt Honoria who had the most perfect discretion was welcome to remain. He was everlastingly grateful to her.

However, there it was. Beatrix had commanded the presence of the family and he had had nothing to say. Wasn't this her day, and hadn't she won the right to disrupt the earth as well as his house by the performance of this deed? And so as an American hus-

band, the most docile of them all, he intended to be as good as gold and play up like a Saint, — though he detested Saints and all their pacifistic ways. Even family days came to an end at last and by five o'clock he knew that Mr. Vanderdyke would begin to fret about getting back to dinner. The rest of the day would be his.

“All that,” was however, by a letter written by Beatrix to her mother a week ago, to contain far more than just the family, though Pelham was in blissful ignorance of this. The postscript, — the meat of every woman's letter, — contained the following subtle lines. “Do you think it would be kind to ask Elizabeth McKenzie to stay with you for three or four days and bring her over when you come? She was very nice to Pelham on the *Galatea* and is his cousin, after all. We ought, I feel, to show our gratitude for that, and she greatly admires you. But if you agree with me it will mean asking Mrs. Beamish, because she is staying at her house I hear and cannot very well be left behind. It will give me the chance to thank this English girl for helping Elizabeth to keep Pelham amused during his anxious time. I have inherited, you see, your well-known habit of paying people back. I only suggest this, mind, and leave it entirely to you, dearest mother. You know so much better what to do than I.”

In the answer that came by return, a typical Mrs. Vanderdyke missive which began with the weather, went on sarcastically to the Senate, stamped on the face of a neighbor, touched upon the ailments of “your poor father” with a frightful effort at humor and came to the point at issue on the inside of the first sheet, so that the whole thing was a puzzle in construc-

tion and almost as difficult to decipher as a Persian poem, it was announced that a royal invitation to E. McK. had included her guest "named I see, darling, after that worried boy in Calverley's foolish poem." The whole elaborate thing written in a Peignoir during the writing hour on paper so plain and thick that it could only belong to a person who wished it to be known that she was far beyond the contingency of losing caste.

Thus does the modern daughter finesse with a woman of an older and a simpler generation.

And when Brownie was given the letter to read and asked in blank amazement why Beatrix had gone to work to get not only the unnecessary Mrs. McK. to such a strictly family affair, but the unknown Mrs. Beamish, who had no claim to be present at all, the truth came out, as it always did between these two.

"Yes, I know," said Beatrix, "it seems absurd. But the other day I happened to stumble by accident on a letter from the Beamish written to my husband. I knew he'd had one because he gave me a message from his cousin, and reminded of something suddenly that he had tucked away in his brain, asked me to be kind to the *Galatea* girl. That meant that the crinkly thing I had felt in his pocket was a little letter from her, and I don't mind telling *you*, Brownie dear, that I pinched it in the most wifely way. . . . Now don't run off with the idea that I'm jealous. I'm not and I should be a rotter if I were. But I'll tell you what I am. I'm all against standing blandly by while my husband, who knows nothing about women and very much less about cats, is made the banker of one who signs herself 'ever your wee friend, May.' Oh, a very clever letter, Brownie, in large round ingenuous

writing, slanting backwards, the inevitable sign of a sponge. Nothing in it that couldn't be read aloud; bad luck accepted with courage and even joked about. The cunning was between the lines and only to be twigged by a wife. So now you know why I'm having her here, — to nip this thing in the bud. We shall have a lovely day to-morrow. Oh, lovely! Congratulations, family joy, life to begin again, — and your wee friend May to tackle. You watch me deal with her!"

"I will," said Brownie, with gusto. "Did you ever! I always said that Mrs. McKenzie is very careless in her choice of friends."

And then, without a word of warning, Beatrix sprang to her stockingless feet, threw back her head, gave a scream of surging vitality and commenced to spring dance in her undies round and round the little brown hen. In the sparkle of her eyes, the flash of her teeth, the gleam of her young limbs she gave out the gorgeous fact that she was back in life again, slim and eager. And with a delicious touch of caricature of those too unconscious maidens who choose a moment to indulge in virginal prancings when a camera is at work, she sprang and twirled and re-sprang until all her breath was gone. Half crying and half laughing she collapsed upon a rug, to die, like Pavlova, the snowy death of the swan.

"Oh, my dear!" cried Brownie. "Please!" to whom this natural outburst, thanksgiving, rejuvenation, in such a costume too, was in the nature of an exhibition somewhat shocking to her class.

She was in for another surprise before she left the room, — one that was going to drive sleep away that night, and, because she knew her Beatrix, gave her a

dread of the future that made her break into gooseflesh.

On her feet again Beatrix went over to the window, quiet, and cool, and unapproachable, and as far from the faithful Brownie as though they stood on different stars. Pelham and Malcolm were walking in the garden, the one lithe and brown and of the country, the other soft and pale of the city. And after watching them in a long silence that Brownie tried to break by opening drawers and pushing chairs about, — she knew better than to speak, — she turned. A sort of formality, a sort of shyness, a little strangeness, and something in her smile. . . . And then the old chuckle and the devil of mischief and the gooseflesh statement.

“Brownie, I’m very much afraid that an imp’s on my shoulder again.”

IV

AND so there was May Beamish, enjoying painfully and with the natural envy of a poor parson’s daughter suffering from a starved desire for luxury, the pomp and thick carpets of the house of Vanderdyke.

The muddled house of the kind Elizabeth was, of course, as different from her Aunt’s in Rutland Gate as a set of rooms in the Buckingham to a family suite at the Ritz. It did, and that was all. It was in the East Fifties, which was, of course, in its favor. Its old brown front had been replaced by marble and stone and ironwork, it was true, and its door was beneath the level of the street, in the approved way. Three steps down meant just as much to the standing

of a house in 1922 as twelve steps up in 1888. It had its three old masters, the least that a banker may have and hold his own, and it had its footman and its crests on the dinner service and several priceless rugs. It had a library and an elevator and the interior decoration of one of the numerous young women who skim through a book on Period Furniture, put three chairs and a brass candlestick in an upper window in Madison Avenue and call themselves experts. It had a Queen Anne chest, made in Brooklyn, on the black and white pavement of the small square hall and *The Cries of London* with their margins gone in the boudoir. The drawing-room was Empire, all very well done in Detroit. But . . .

The Vanderdyke House! Ah. Here the chest of "your wee friend May" expanded and all her dreams came true. This, — this was the real thing. Tradition, dignity, corridors, marble pillars, Gobelin tapestries, two Rembrandt portraits of old Dutch Vanderdykes brought over from the grave and stately house in Amsterdam; cabinets of the rarest porcelains, and tiles which dealers would give their gold teeth just to touch; first editions, three men in plush, a Ducal butler, a Breakfast Room; hush; a fountain playing to twittering love birds in a Conservatory, bronzes flagrantly nude; a writing table in every bedroom, sealing-wax, note paper and stamps; strange things in every bathroom to puzzle the uninitiated eye.

Here, in the regal rooms in which, almost without regret, an ex-Emperor could ponder in comfort on former theatricalism and ineffable miscalculation, May had spent three breathless, jealous days. But for the war, which now seemed more than ever to have been made to spoil her individual life, the B. B. Steamship

Company would have placed her in similar suitable surroundings. She had been born with a feeling for all these things. She had inherited from her wretched father's forbears an eye for objets d'art. Her innate sense of plates made her recognize their aristocracy without turning them upside down. Old Masters touched responsive notes that made music in her soul. Blood tingled in the tips of her fingers at the sight of every antique. She glowed before Gobelins, gasped in front of Sèvres, worshipped at the feet of primitives, palpitated to the call of prints. And as she went slowly from one Vanderdyke gem to another the tragedy of having been born to the cheap Axminster and broken wicker-work of the Rectory brought on a spasm of unrealized expensiveness and gave her one full hour of the joy of martyrdom. But she allowed herself no more, being practical and young.

By one of those odd coincidences that happen every minute she went up to her room to think things over at the moment when Beatrix talked to Brownie about nipping it in the bud, and Pelham, in answer to Malcolm's question, said "Mrs. Beamish? Let's see. Yes. I had a letter, but I don't know what the dickens I did with it. Frightfully careless, but it was quite cheerful and didn't call for a reply."

She knew how she stood. It was not her way to specialize in the art of self-deception or twist the meaning of words. The *Galatea* had broken the ice with Franklin and proved to him that she was his wee friend. No more. If he were a man of fifty, or even forty-five, she would be going to his house to-morrow on a different footing. She would be in a position to ask him for anything she liked. But, in addition to being in love with his wife, he was only thirty-five,

deaf and blind to the sex rattle of herself or any other girl. That was the devil of it. That was what made the whole thing most difficult and unusual. Work? Yes, she would have to do so indeed, with the utmost diplomacy and cunning, on tiptoe. She couldn't stay much longer under the McKenzie roof. She'd wear out her welcome and lose a friend. McKenzie, it was true, was over fifty, but then he was a financier and got all his excitement downtown. Which was a pity. But there was something about the way in which she had met Franklin that appealed to her superstitious side. She had been taken on board the *Galatea* after she had been in America for several weeks and nothing good had come out of them. She had begun to think that all the stories of New York's rich men were fables because up till then everyone who had dined with the McKenzies had talked poor, exposed the wounds of Income Tax and complained of Bad Business. It had depressed her, this epidemic from which she had hoped to escape, and made her ask herself if she wouldn't have done better to have saved her expensive passage on the *Aquitania* and given Germany a try. But the *Galatea* had spelt money. All the facts about Franklin that she had managed to squeeze from Mrs. McKenzie without appearing to ask ran into oodles of money. The whole yacht reeked of money, and dollar bills flew round its mastheads like seagulls. Then, too, the name *Galatea* had seemed so right, so appropriate. She would have backed it to her last shilling. And, finally, to clinch everything, the man who owned it was at a loose end at a time notoriously useful to little women adrift in the world.

Franklin had gone ashore, however, just at the moment when she had been about to place herself

permanently on his list of charities, a most undeserved misfortune, on top of the complete revision of her usual easy methods, and many days of a delicacy in approach that would have done credit to a psychoanalyst or a professional confidence man. She had to open up, therefore, a new attack, a new encircling movement. She had so to work things as to make herself most pleasing to the wife and in this way obtain an invitation for at least a week. On the golf course, and during those moments of necessity during which the boy was nursed, she would then be able, she had no doubt, to regain her former position and go one better. A plain statement of her case, made with a brave smile but a little tremble of the lips, a blunt unvarnished story of how she must earn a living in the oldest of the professions or starve, and Franklin, if she had read him truly, would devote an atom of his millions to the beautiful work of rescue. On the income derived from such a generous gift she might not be able to buy or even rent a dear old house in England, chucked away as they were, but she could go and live in a Castle in Austria which would rival the Vanderdyke house and start a collection of china and prints that would bring joy to her heart.

“So there you are, my dear,” she said, winding up. “That’s the scheme. I shall like this Beatrix, I know. The photographs all over the *Galatea* show a most attractive face. And it’s so much less trouble really to like than to be obliged to act. Here’s to the great day then. God save the working girl.”

Little your wee friend May knew of the Beatrix fighting spirit.

V

AND it *was* a great day, say what you will.

Here was that anachronism an idealist in well-cut clothes, an artist with short hair, a sybarite who had risen hungry from every meal, a man with far too much money who had made a collection of nothing but health. Here was one of those rare men who, without being a prig, a coward, or one who had gazed with longing eyes at the flesh-pots through the barbed wire of a religion, had taken to marriage a whole and complete love, an ardor and a passion that had not been trifled with; to whom marriage was, therefore, a serious and a beautiful thing, not entered into in the modern way as a toss-up, a brief adventure easily emerged from by the payment of a few thousand dollars to a lawyer, but as a permanency, like patriotism, the allegiance to a country. Having been through the surprise, shock, and delight of a first child with a sympathy so exquisite and an imagination so agonizing as almost to have put him through the final pains, he was at last to welcome downstairs the girl who had added admiration to his love, and gratitude to his respect.

And here was a girl who could not be found in any country but America, born to people of amazing wealth and brought up in an atmosphere which had everything of regality except the democratic spirit. Nothing that money could procure or the inventiveness of fond minds provide had been left out of a consistent

plan to spoil and warp. She had the sort of beauty too that is quite enough to turn any young head and is as great a handicap to happiness as being an only child in these surroundings. If she had been destined to occupy a throne she could not have been more grotesquely fitted for that difficult job. Every minute of her infancy, childhood and adolescence had been mapped out to a routine calculated to inflate her egotism, enlarge her vanity, and lead her into the appalling belief that she had been divinely appointed. The inhuman treatment which did not permit her to do the simplest thing for herself and made her see life through a body-guard of sycophants and flatterers ought to have molded her into a most unpleasant person. She had masters and mistresses for every conceivable and many quite inconceivable things, every one of them designed to unfit her for companionship, marriage and motherhood. And when the brains of her doting, foolish, and at the same time martinet parents ran dry specialists in the up-bringing of millionaires' daughters were hired to discover fresh absurdities for the poor child's ruination. In this they very nearly succeeded. But for the possession of a sense of humor that nothing could overcome and which was most disconcerting to them all, like a squint in a statue of Psyche or a stammer in a man born to a place in the Cabinet, Beatrix would have come through permanently and triumphantly impossible. She had been temporarily unable to tell the truth during several periods of her young career, which was natural enough, and had then displayed so great a lack of consideration for other people's feelings and so monumental an amount of impertinent autocracy towards everyone about her as to cause her family and her

tutors to congratulate themselves on their handiwork, and Malcolm Fraser, her persistent friend, the man who had given her his heart before he had emerged from growing pains, almost to despair of her character.

But the good angel who had been appointed to watch over her, and her own sense of humor which had survived through everything, to say nothing of poor little Brownie's boundless faith in her power to conquer the effects of Vanderdykeism, which had helped so much, had brought her through. Then came the last of these periods, during which she took it into her head to enjoy the feminine game of playing with fire in the boulder studio of Sutherland York, and stood up to her neck in a scandal that shook the fatuously complacent house of Vanderdyke to its deep foundations; lied herself out of this her last indulgence and claimed Pelham as the man to whom she was secretly married; was put through a midnight hour of unforgettable indignity by him in her bedroom at home and then turned down on the very edge of what the French so poetically call *le moment suprême*; was taken on the *Galatea* on a sham honeymoon in order to stop the clacking tongues of New York, and was brought to her knees by love like any ordinary girl; was married in Ireland when that incurable country was suffering from the agonies of prosperity under the kindness of the British heel, and came back to Pelham's cottage no longer the spoilt daughter of a millionaire but the charming normal girl who gave as much as she was taking because she loved as greatly as she was loved.

To her, then, this was even a greater day than it was to her husband, who, though a millionaire like her father, had achieved the miracle of remaining normal.

She had won the right to be numbered, in spite of all monarchical attempts to the contrary, among the human creatures who swarm out of the Subway. She had presented the dearest of gifts to the man who had brought her into realities and given a grandson to the family which in spite of it's ability to buy the earth would otherwise have petered out. And last but by no means least she was slim and eager again, good to look at once more, able to play tennis and golf, to ride, to swim, to let her car go at the devil's own lick if she felt like it, and to dance all night if a superabundant vitality was to be worn down in no other way. Another chapter of life and love, with April gone over the hill.

And here was this futile and rather tragic family, — the father who had never recovered from the crushing weight of the gold that had descended upon him, and who had gone through life pestered by charities, societies, countries, begging letter-writers, widows, company promoters, inventors, drama societies, Art Institutes and gold brick merchants; bewildered between the deprivation of self-help and self-expression and the hopeless inability to know what best to do with the superfluous money with which he had been punished for a sin that he hadn't committed. The nebulous man, old before his time, who knew himself to be a paradox in the present condition of civilization and was without the energy, the spirit, or the strength of character to join the ranks of ordinary man; who clung pathetically to the far-off traditions of the pre-reformation Dutch nobility with one hand, and with the other clutched at the sham aristocracy that wealth has created in a democratic country, — a self-conscious multi-millionaire, a rare specimen in a human Zoo

which was losing its other objects of public amazement one after another. A man without a son.

The mother, a once beautiful and always foolish woman, who having, with the cold-blooded determination of the female spider hunted poor Vanderdyke to the very steps of the altar, commenced her reign as the leader of New York Society with a resuscitation of lofty and exclusive pomp that awed and delighted the snobs and deeply impressed the newspapers. A woman who steeped herself in the chequered story of the Vanderdykes and came out of the pages of Dutch history with a higher chin and a more supercilious expression; who made several pilgrimages to Holland, lingered in the fifteenth century town house of the family on the Heerenstrade at Amsterdam which had become the head office of a Bank, drove through the neat and wonderfully cultivated countrý to Amersfoort, and gazed through the iron gates of an old and beautiful place which had been built for his bride by an early Baron and was now in the hands of a war 'profiteer'; spent many days in the Amsterdam National Gallery among the portraits of her husband's ancestors by Rembrandt, Vandyke and Vanderveer which have never been surpassed and very rarely equalled, and after every visit returned to her social duties in New York with a greater assurance and a higher bust. Being herself the daughter of a man without a grandfather who had lived beyond the decent income of an honest member of the Stock Exchange to put his children into fashionable schools and allow his wife to compete with better provided friends, and who had gone, therefore, to a comparatively early grave worn to the bone by the struggle, in the usual

way, she was as enthusiastic a convert to aristocracy as a Baptist to Roman Catholicism. It need not be said that she overplayed her part, over-pearled her public appearances, and over-worked her social secretaries. The wonder of it was that she succeeded finally in achieving motherhood even to the extent of a lone girl, because her husband had suffered from a lack of concentration while she was forever on her feet. It had been her fetish to do everything well, and the one mutual interest she ever really shared with Vanderdyke was his disappointment at her failure to provide a son. Her life had been exemplary not because of an inherent moral sense, or a lack of temptation, but because she had lived in the belief that the eyes of all the world were upon her. According to her lights an effective woman, at whose entrance to her box at the Metropolitan, cold, erect, mercilessly well-dressed, with a face as immovable as one of Benda's masks, the whole house had almost risen to its feet. According to the common standards of happiness, contentment and usefulness, as tragic a figure as the queer little man to whom she had given less companionship than the llama's head in his study.

The aunt, a fine and splendid woman, who had built a monument to the memory of the man who had taken her everlasting love into his grave, of kindness, personal service to a hundred worthy charities, and faith.

All three were to have the joy of holding in their arms again the girl who had given them a keen and emotional interest in life at a time when they owned to the deadly truth of having made very little of it themselves.

And there was Malcolm Fraser.

There was also Mrs. Beamish with her need of generosity.

A great day, say what you will.

VI

“THEY have arrived,” said Aunt Honoria.

Beatrix turned from her dressing table, gave one of Pelham’s largest and loudest handkerchiefs to Brownie, who had waited for the entrance of Miss Vanderdyke in order to enjoy an hysterical breakdown, and went over to the kind woman who had seen her through every stage of her great performance with such exquisite tenderness.

“I shall miss you when you go back with mother this afternoon,” she said in a low voice. “I’ve known for the first time in my life what a mother really means.”

“My dear, dear child!”

They held each other tight, but not in silence because Brownie was giving a faithful imitation of a gurgling water tap. There are times in the lives of all small-part people when the desire to stand in the full glare of the limelight is beyond their power to resist.

And then Aunt Honoria stood away from Beatrix and looked her up and down. A quick glance about the ample room had told her of the extraordinary pains that her niece had taken over the clothes for her re-appearance. The bed was littered with discarded garments and there were shoes all over the floor. It might have been a dressmaker’s shop after the visit

of a profiteer's wife. The result met with approval, though with just a hint of surprise. Miss Vanderdyke herself, under the circumstances, would have gone in for the several colors of celebration.

But Beatrix was all in white. Her only colors were the ripe yellow of her hair, the grey-blue of her wide apart eyes, the delicate rose of her rouge pot and the brilliant blood of her lip stick. The imp that was perched on her shoulder for the purpose of teaching Pelham how little he knew about women had whispered "White for virginity. Remember that you have a grudge against your husband."

"Do you like me?" she asked, knowing the answer.

And Aunt Honoria's smile replied that like was not the word.

"I watched them arrive from my window," said Beatrix. "I'm not the only one who's dramatizing to-day. Father hopped out of the car like a man just injected with monkey glands and the Queen Mother issued forth with a graciousness that rivals the sunshine, and in spite of his white waistcoat the Major might have been a robin in the prime of life."

"I watched them, too. Your mother would always rather have lost a pearl than done a tactless thing, and so I cannot understand what made her bring Elizabeth McKenzie and a total stranger on a day like this."

"Oh," said Beatrix, with one of her blue-grey looks of utter candor, "I'm afraid I'm rather responsible for that. Yes. You know how extraordinary generous one feels when things have gone too well almost to be true? It was in that mood that I wrote to mother the other day and suggested the invitation of Pelham's cousin. Don't you think it's fair that he should have one relation here? Er . . . Mrs. Beamish

is one of the prettiest women I think I've ever seen." And having got that over in her best manner she swung back to domestics again. "As part of a little scheme that I have in my head I've not permitted Pelham to see me this morning, but he was up at dawn, Brownie tells me, cutting every flower in the garden. He sent up a bouquet with my breakfast large enough to fill the bath. And how do you think it has affected Malcolm? To verse, the dear old thing. He sent me ten lovely lines that he must have sat up all last night to write. And here's Brownie going on like a recalcitrant steam heater, while every servant in the house has gone completely mad. It might be a wedding, but for baby. He's caught the excitement too. I wish you could have seen his tantrums before breakfast, and the way he landed his left on his nurse's face! Another King of Beasts, like his father."

Which won an almost ribald laugh. Only to European husbands can this term be honestly applied.

"Well, now perhaps we'd better go down, or have you planned a special entrance?"

"Yes, I have. Herd everyone into the hall in about ten minutes from now and then, suddenly, like the star in a play, about whom everyone has been saying the nicest things, I'll appear at the top of the stairs, and win a round of applause. It's awfully silly but I'll never have such a part as this again."

"I hope so," said Aunt Honoria, "several times. It rather spoils the dramatic effect for your father and mother to have seen the boy already, though, as a matter of fact they have only seen him twice."

"Don't you believe it," said Beatrix. "Two formal visits, yes. But they've waited for him, incognito,

every afternoon for a fortnight in the path through the woods. What do you think of that?"

The picture of Mr. and Mrs. Vanderdyke, of all living people, driving surreptitiously to a place where the hedge was low, helping each other over and waiting for the baby to be wheeled along in his perambulator by the blasé woman who probably considered that they too should be under the care of a nurse, leaped to Aunt Honoria's eyes. But, somehow, knowing her brother and sister-in-law so well and the joy that had come to them in this second-hand way, it awoke no laughter. On the contrary, it filled her with sympathy, — she, who would have given so much to have been the grandmother of this unconscious miracle with all that it would have meant.

And she said so in her economical way, and once more held the white girl in her arms. And then, somewhat puzzled at her niece's remark as to the little scheme that was in her head and the fact that she had kept Pelham away from her that morning, left to greet the family, and stage manage the scene.

And then Brownie seized her chance, dabbing her eyes with the large bandana. "Oh, my dear, my dear," she said, "I've been through everything that's led up to this with you and I wouldn't have missed one moment of the worry. You've driven me nearly to death with your ins-and-outs, but you've made me very proud of the way you've done all this. I'm just an old nuisance, on your hands from charity, but I'd be burnt at the stake to prove my gratitude, and I love you as much as any of them. I wish you everything they're going to wish you, my dear, and more, *so much more*." And with a most disconcerting humility and deep feel-

ing she caught up the hand of her only friend and pressed it to her lips.

And when Beatrix succeeded, at last, in having her room to herself she stood quite still and looked at the imp on her shoulder. "Well, you little devil," she asked, "what are you going to do with me now? You made me lie myself into the first of all this and then left me. And while you've been busy with other young women I've married for love and been a good girl. I've had great good luck, and proved my man, and made my people happy. And I haven't got one boy on my hands, but two, and I mean everything to them both. Just at the moment when I ought to be going downstairs the proud mother and clinging wife, *you* pop up again. And through you your wee friend May. . . . What are you going to do with me now? — that's what I want to know."

VII

BORED stiff with the crowd and with giving the same answers to the same questions, and standing on one leg to listen to bursts of separate egotism; with having to wear the company smile and break into the company laugh, be smacked on the back by the Major and feel like knocking him down; with paying forced attention to the whispered confidence of Mrs. Vanderdyke, who had just reached the whispering state, the exuberant chaff of Elizabeth McKenzie delivered at the top of her voice, and being led into corners by his father-in-law to listen to something of

peculiar importance which the old man immediately forgot, Pelham was on the point of going up to Beatrix in desperation when her slim white figure gleamed at the top of the stairs. But for the fear of making an ass of himself that has taken the heroics from modern life he would have charged through the Phalanx of talking women and carried her down in his arms. As it was he waved his hand, swallowed the heart that rose to his mouth, and backed away from the rush.

“Welcome to our City,” cried the Major, as everyone knew that he would. If it had been raining he would have added “glorious weather for ducks”, but as it was sunny he said, “well, is this hot enough for you?” His whole conversation was made up of elevator clichés, uttered as though they were witty impromptus. He wasn’t a Major who had never been in the Army for nothing. And Beatrix, like the star in a play, made the most of her wonderful part. With a flick of a smile at Aunt Honoria she came slowly and sweetly downstairs. No stage heroine that she had ever seen had been permitted to become a mother. That happened after the curtain had fallen. It was a hard and fast rule of the game. And so, acting for all she was worth, because of the imp on her shoulder, she invented an air of young maternity, pride mixed with modesty, dignity with shyness, and having given the Major her hand to kiss, slipped into the arms of her mother.

“My darling,” said Mrs. Vanderdyke, though she didn’t quite approve of the clothes. A touch of blue or even pink would have been so much more appropriate to the occasion. She ought to have gone upstairs. She had felt this all along. Dear me, dear me! How independent the modern girl is, to be sure!

And then to her father. "Well, Daddy, are you pleased with me now?"

For the first time for years that nebulous man carried an impulse to a conclusion and actually achieved a kiss. "Pelham Vanderdyke Franklin," he said, saying aloud the words that had run through his brain like an advertisement.

Whereupon Elizabeth pounced. "I never thought you could do it," she cried, wittily, as though starting an early morning address to the League for Political Education on the platform of the Town Hall. "'Pon my soul, I never did. You absolutely refute all my fixed ideas about the flapper, my dear. You really do. It's a record. It's . . ."

It didn't matter that Beatrix had passed along to Malcolm. On she went like an open hydrant, gushing a torrent of words.

"Dear old Mally," said Beatrix.

But Malcolm couldn't speak.

And then with one hand on Pelham's arm, she held out the other to Mrs. Beamish, whom they had forgotten to introduce. "So kind of you to come," she said, purring.

"So good of you to let me," said Mrs. Beamish, with that open smile of hers.

"I should have known you anywhere from Pelham's glowing description."

"I didn't think he knew what I was like."

And while Mrs. McKenzie's torrent went on, Mrs. Vanderdyke repaired her make-up, the old man edged into the garden to look for Pelham Vanderdyke Franklin, Malcolm went over to Aunt Honoria and the Major and Pelham fell into the attitude of a puzzled stork,

these two young women stood face to face, sizing each other up.

Honest admiration was what May Beamish felt. By Jove, how photography failed! No wonder he had eyes for no other girl.

Pretty? Prettier than a picture. A delicious water color. Um, I see.

Most cordial smiles and the warmest clasp of hands.

"We're going to be friends," said Mrs. Beamish.

And Beatrix answered, "Our wee friend May already."

Damn! She had read that letter! . . . What a fool she'd been to write.

"Lunch is served, Madam."

But in the general move to the dining room and when everybody's backs were turned Pelham made a dart at his slim and eager girl. Wasn't he ever to have a look in?

"Bee — Bee," — he said, hungry to touch. No longer were her feet on a chair. She had done this thing superbly. The doctor and the nurses and the days and nights of waiting had gone. All in white she might have been his bride again. She had come back to life and love.

But up went her hand, and with a little shyness, a sort of formality, she held herself away. "Oh no, Pel, please," she said.

"Why not? I've been aching — just aching for this."

"Have you, Pel?"

"You know I have. What do you mean?"

But this time it wasn't her hand that kept him off. There was something in her smile . . . she had allowed a bubble of disappointment to enter her soul, an infini-

tesimal sense of grievance. It was Beatrix and not the star who stood before him then.

“What is it?” he asked, knowing nothing about women. “What is it?”

“Shall I tell you now, or wait till after lunch?”

“Tell me now. Good God, what have I done? I’ve tried to think.”

There would have been a moment of silence but for the distant cackle of Elizabeth McKenzie and the silvery laugh of May.

“You went away. Oh Pel, you went away,” she said.

“But you — you *told* me to go. You *told* me to go!”

“I know I did, — but you went, and you shouldn’t have gone.”

And she dropped her hand and turned away, and took the imp into lunch on her shoulder.

PART IV

I

SITTING with her father on her right and the Major on her left, with the utterly dumbfounded Pelham opposite between Mrs. Vanderdyke and Elizabeth McKenzie, Beatrix conducted through her never flagging line of hostess talk a zigzag of thought which wound among smiling meadows like the Thames.

Great cheerfulness prevailed. The cook had made up her mind not only that everyone must be hungry but that everything should constitute a record in her culinary efforts. Good wine accompanied her admirable handiwork. As though with a premonition of that ridiculous and drink-encouraging law which has also succeeded in creating another ring of robbers Pelham's father had devoted much care and money to his cellar. The praiseworthy result of this was that if the present owner of the house lived to a hundred, — at the moment he wished that he was dead — he would even then be able to remind his luckless friends of what ancient and long forgotten hospitality had been like, — always assuming that the Bolsheviks who have been brought to life by Prohibition were not able, in the meantime, to break into the house and help themselves to what the Government could not prevent them from buying from other countries but made no effort to provide the money with which they could do so.

The long low-ceilinged room with its old oak beams and Jacobean furniture, its nice collection of prints and china, pewter and brass, had never looked more cheery or more homelike. Everywhere flowers welcomed the return of Beatrix.

Watching the expert way in which May Beamish drew Malcolm on to air his views and darted quick examining looks at Pelham, — she had been married long enough to recognize the rift within the Franklin lute — Beatrix alternated between her private conversation and public talk. “ Oh, yes, of course, Daddy. He shall be brought down immediately after lunch . . . Um, queer things, girls. Nobody understands us and I don’t believe many of us really understand ourselves. . . . No, mother. We haven’t definitely decided how long we shall remain here. Probably till the middle of June and then a cruise. Pelham has views on the subject. . . . I’ve been hurt, — even if the bruise is so small that it couldn’t be found with a microscope. I know it’s unfair and unjust to put it down to Pelham and make him pay. And I don’t know why I’m going to do it, but I am. It’s the girl of me that I was born with . . . My dear Uncle, I like to see you eat. Everything’s here for you to punish. Château Lafitte, 1906, I think. Oh, was that a good year? I’m so glad. . . . When he should have been calm and strong, at the time when I needed him most, he left me, that’s the point. I know I told him to go. I know it’s my fault that he went. I know it’s utterly illogical to carry it all through this wonderful dream and it’s beastly cruel to poor old Pel, but I’m going to do it because it is illogical. That’s us. That’s girl. . . . All out of the garden, Cousin Elizabeth. Everything grows well here. I wish you could have seen the lilac.

. . . There won't be any satisfaction in my life whatever, never mind how completely happy I really am, until I've made him suffer a little for what I made myself suffer a little. So that's that. There isn't an imp on my shoulder. That's the excuse I've got to make for a little orgy of mischief. There isn't an imp. It's me. It's the odd part of the girl of me which nobody understands. . . . I don't know your English country very well. You know how Americans rush through. Is it? Like Buckinghamshire? Really. That's what Malcolm says. . . . If I could be dead honest, and if I could I shouldn't be a girl, I should tell myself that I'm in this tricky mood to bring out all the man of Pel. It's mermaid stuff. It's holding him off to draw him on. It's teasing. If he'd said I'll see you hanged before I leave you, and played the King of Beasts, there wouldn't have been any rankle at all. I'd have adored to be disobeyed. Now I'm out to make him spank me, "treat me rough" and give me a thrill. I'm back again and full of devil. I want Romance after being practical so long. I want to be pre-historic. I want to be mastered with a huge stone ax and shoutings. I want to be gripped and flung. Oh, it's so easy if he only knew! Girl, just girl. Why don't they teach men this? . . . Lunch on Sunday? I should love to, Daddy. Not a second later than one. . . . If he gets an inspiration before to-night, or a hint from Aunt Honoria who may have sensed the game I'm playing, I shall be as right as rain to-morrow, and what I call my imp will go. Meantime, in spite of my preponderance of commonsense, I shall put him through it with every ingenious bit of me. And, by Jove, yes! I'll call up Alec Greenwood and make him come and stay. Jealousy's always

useful. He knows that boy was following me about and I've never told him exactly how things stood. Alec's objectionably young too. And Pelham has a birthday coming that he hopes he won't remember. . . . You beast!"

And on she went, analysing, condemning, excusing, inventing, but never swerving from her rather dangerous plan. It was all, as she told herself, girl. Girl the unfathomable, sensitive, wayward, contradictory, mischievous, and sometimes delicious creature for whom a man will sell his hopes of Heaven, and pawn his peace of mind; as queer as the weather and as difficult to prophesy about. One careless or would-be humorous word can call up a cloud that presently will bring about an unexpected burst of rain, while one that is angry and even brutal in the middle of lowering unsettled weather and instantly the sky is clear and out comes the sun. They are born with a hankering for something that they don't know how to define and which no man, even as a lover, can ever provide them with. They are always hunting for the impossible perfection, the perfect happiness, and they are obliged to come out of youth either with make-believe or makeshift. Their feeling and desire for romance, whatever that may be, — beauty, tenderness, fidelity, perhaps, who knows? — leads them into accepting substitutes in their hurry to obtain it and then follows, according to their strength of character or capacity for martyrdom, a lifetime to make the best of it. The sort of blow that would cripple a man puts them into regal health, while the touch of a finger on a sensitive spot and the agony stops their hearts. They need enthusiasm as a flower needs water and without enjoyment they will wither up. They can stand mere physical

pain with infinitely more courage and endurance than a man, but give them mental pain, — disillusion, a lack of sympathy, a glowering face, no admiration, — and they wilt into a decline. A man may become a master of art, of war, of science and of men, but he can never really understand a girl.

II

AND after lunch the boy was brought down to be adored.

Pelham Vanderdyke Franklin was, of course, like every other baby of the same age, unique in the annals of babies. The way he sat on the nurse's brawny arm, looked from face to face with round astonished eyes, moved the pudgy fingers of his dimpled hands, screwed up his toes when people came too close, and opened his mouth in a burst of silent laughter when the Major, lost to all sense of dignity, made a Matabele of himself and conducted a conversation in the language of clicks, was, without the slightest doubt, Wonderful. What intelligence, what humor, what amazing self-possession, what tact! And the delicate suggestion of eyebrows and of down upon the ivory dome! How exactly like his mother. Yes, but there's his father's nose. And, mark you, already there's the old Dutch Vanderdyke pride about the chin. Good bone, my boy, and if you notice the length of line from the ankle to the knee every indication of growing into as tall a man as his father. Or even taller. Yes, even taller. And look at those wrists for polo and that eye

for a gun. And feel those little bumps behind the ears. Music! And languages in the cut of the jaw. . . . "and, oh God, what will my little man make of himself when he emerges from being made?"

And as he looked at all those different faces with that wide blank stare, did he do his share of speculation and make a summing up? Did he ask himself if Mrs. Vanderdyke really imagined that she could play Canute with age with all that dye and paint and massage and the self-inflicted penalties that they spelt? If old man Vanderdyke still believed that he could not have put up a fight against inheritance and cut his way to life? Did he ask himself why the Major had allowed that bulge below his waistcoat, and Mrs. McKenzie that easily interpreted story of unfulfilment that could be heard beneath her noise? Why the whitehaired lady stood with her hand upon her breast, the ugly man in goggles seemed unhappy and out of touch, and why the tiny lady with the flower face was looking without the slightest friendliness clean through his head? And why the tall man with the small moustache imitated a puzzled stork and hardly looked at him at all? He didn't have to ask himself about the warm-eyed girl with the tender hands that did exactly what was right. He knew. Of course he knew. She belonged to him. And being Wonderful the betting is that he knew everything else as well, even that May Beamish was looking through his head into a problematical future in which Vanderdykes and Franklins stood on very different ground. But what he didn't know, Wonderful as he was, was what nobody had the humbleness to see, even those who dared to face the inexorable fact that the future is the past entered through the same old gate; though all the while there

is another gate, the key to which, bearing the name of Christ, is brotherhood.

And then, suddenly, P. V. Franklin demanded sleep, the round eyes blinked, the pudgy hands relaxed, panic prevailed, and a dozen suggestions were flung about, while Beatrix, who did everything that was right, took him in her arms, with his face against her neck; carried him out to the perambulator, and placed him comfortably in. And when she kissed him he opened his eyes before sleep completely wiped out grimacing faces and flicking watch lids and funny noises and gave her a look of blind and perfect faith that pinned upon her breast the golden cross of the Legion of Motherhood.

No one was in the hall when she went back except your wee friend May, who was going to suggest a stroll to Pelham and was waiting while he had gone to fetch his pipe. There was nothing new or grotesque about her clothes; no hanging, swaying things, nor that atrocious belt lowered to the point of indiscretion that gives a woman the appearance of having small and stumpy legs on an elephantine trunk; no excessive shortness of skirt that is equally ugly, and often very tragic. She was so well dressed that one didn't notice what she had on. Her extraordinary prettiness was not killed by an atrocious frame. She looked almost too young to be out alone.

Mrs. Vanderdyke had withdrawn to the drawing-room for restoration. Elizabeth had been edged by Aunt Honoria into the garden, where there was less echo in her voice. The Major had gone with Malcolm to see the horses and to tell some stories more appropriate to fish. And so Beatrix bore down upon the

Beamish with her most charming hostess smile. This was exactly what she wanted.

“Sit down and have a talk,” she said, touching May rather sweetly on the arm. “Shall we?”

What the deuce? These grey-blue girls, — *she* knew them. This didn’t go with the pre-lunch attitude, when the sword had rattled for just a second. “If it won’t bore you,” she replied.

“Heavens, no!” said Beatrix. “I’m interested in everything.” She made a long arm for a box of cigarettes and held it out with camaraderie.

“Oh, thanks, so much.” This interested and friendly tone seemed to hide no guile? There was nothing overdone about it, apparently. Could it be that she had simply been told about the letter? After all, *our* wee friend May, she’d said, as though she’d joined her husband in the bond. Um . . . Well, in any case, was it better to go out with a more than ever elusive man, if she could get him to come, which was doubtful, than stay and put in good work with the wife and angle for the vital invitation?

“But don’t let me keep you,” said Beatrix, getting the other’s feeling of irresolution, “if you’ve anything better to do.”

May was a worker. The devil of it was that she couldn’t afford to lose a customer. “Whatever I had to do I’d scratch,” she said, sitting down, “to hear you talk.”

“Ah, how Elizabethan.” And Beatrix put a cushion behind the little soul and a chair in place for herself. It was a foot, two feet, perhaps, nearer than casual acquaintanceship used. “Well, — and how do you like us?”

“Awfully, — if you mean you and your husband,

and it's inspiring to find a married couple so truly happy, I can tell you; if Americans generally, I like everyone I've met."

"That was very able," said Beatrix. "Very."

The laugh was catching. Phew, these grey-blue girls! "But, after all, what did you expect me to say?"

"I didn't expect. I didn't even worry to hope. I knew that I could rely on your saying something really good because — well, you look like that."

A bow, a warming smile, but a query that persisted. "That still makes me want to ask you how you like me?"

Without a second's hesitation, and with an enthusiasm that was thoroughly sincere, Beatrix answered. "I think you're quite the prettiest thing," she said, "that I've ever seen in my life."

Then she *hadn't* read that letter . . . or had she? May could guarantee to tackle any sort of man, but when it came to girls, and *this* girl — However, if she knew the game she was a generous opponent, and would drop her weapon if the cause of fight were frankly explained. And so May stripped herself of armor and stood stark, your wee friend May, the girl who had nothing to hide. "Then you're the only one who does," she said, "in this house."

"Oh, really? What do you mean?" The sudden flash of nakedness, so to speak, had startled Beatrix a little.

May made herself perfectly comfortable, hitched the cushion, snuggled into the chair. She was off on an inspiration. It was not a fight but murder if one of the parties flung every weapon away. "Well," she said, pushing down the fourth wall all at once,

“I used every known female trick on the *Galatea* to make your husband think as you do, — I had a wonderful chance, as you know, — but I might just as well have been his sister. That’s an extraordinary man of yours, Mrs. Franklin. There was I, with nothing against me but Mrs. McKenzie, bottled up on a yacht with lots of nice clothes and every intention of having a good time, the prettiest girl you’ve ever seen, as, of course, I know, and to my utter astonishment I made no more impression than a signet ring on frozen sealing wax. And, by Jove, I did everything I knew. And there was water everywhere, which somehow is always supposed to help, long days with nothing to distract, a dear good lady with an overflow of talk, and an absent wife about — it almost sounds like a fairy tale — to have a baby. What could be more perfect? But in the end, if he’d been put through an examination, he couldn’t have answered a single question as to what I’m like. A frightful blow to any woman’s vanity, — and I have lots. And even when I went to the trouble to write a friendly letter to thank him for the cruise, so utterly had I failed that not a line did I get in reply. It was a nice little note, too, I thought. Didn’t you?”

“Quite a nice little note,” said Beatrix breathlessly. “How rude of him not to answer.”

“But, of course, I now know why.” And the wide gesture of admiration was Oriental in its eloquence.

Which Beatrix accepted and pooh-poohed. . . . Clever? She should think so. Dear old Pel. He *was* an extraordinary man not to have been a little affected by this experienced purring puss. But if she imagined that this ingenious frankness could wipe out the S.O.S. for money that was written between

the lines of the nice little note, she was making an almost German error of psychology. Charity Beatrix was wholly in favor of, but for gold-digging she had no sympathy at all, especially when the mine bore the name of her husband. She wasn't certain, but everything pointed to the fact that the Beamish was working to be so much liked as to achieve an invitation to come and have another go at Pelham. Otherwise why set out to prove that she had utterly failed to attract? Now for some fun, then.

"How much longer are you going to be with Cousin Elizabeth, wee friend?" she asked.

Up went those small round shoulders in a shrug. "She's too kind, but out of common decency, I must pass on soon. Where to go, — that's the point. In a new world all alone. I'm simply longing for the country."

"Yes," said Beatrix. "I was wondering how you can stand the city in this weather. It's very lovely here."

"Yes, a sweet place. Home, in every sense of the word. Something that I've — I've never had. However," — and then came the plucky smile, the brave tilt of the small round chin, — "some of us must be the Also-rans. . . . Golf near here?"

"I think it's the best course we've got in America. Pelham said you play a fine game, so you'd like it's being difficult."

"Ra-ther. I was just as good as born in a bunker."

"The riding's excellent, too, and there's tennis, of course."

"Water near for bathing?" It wasn't a *sine qua non*, but it was just as well to know.

Beatrix was sorry about that. "No, not very near,

and then not good, I'm afraid. But there's a splendid bathing pool in the garden that we use all the time."

"Ah," said May, "how well you do things here." A bathing pool sounded all right for want of anything better. Nice, in fact. Undress in the house, and all that. Hot water and a drink of sorts. Very jolly.

"Also we're frightfully keen on bridge. And according to Pelham you're a second Mrs. Elwell."

May's laugh rang among the rafters. "Did he really notice that?"

"Also," added Beatrix, like a child building a tower of bricks for the joy of making it crash, "we've a bowling alley for wet days and an English billiard table."

"Oh, pills. How topping." Would she have to come by train or could she run to a hired car?

Malcolm came and stood at the door. In passing the open window he had caught a look in Beatrix's eye that called him urgently in. And so Beatrix rose and pushed her chair back. Icy cordiality that would have done the greatest credit to the wife of a born Ambassador had taken the place, with a flick, of her former breezy manner. "Well," she said, "if you're going to be here some autumn it would give us so much pleasure if you could spare us several days."

"In other words, if you're passing, pass," thought May, staggering to the ropes. Oh, these grey-blue girls.

"Will you excuse me for a moment, Mrs. Beamish?"

"Oh, please." For a week, a year, a lifetime. She didn't care.

"Oh, Mally." And when Beatrix, greatly surprised to see the dear old thing, joined him at the door, her

eyes were gleaming and there was triumph in her smile.

This was probably only the first of a series of rounds, — Your wee friend May was a stayer, she could tell — but she had taken *that* on points, at any rate.

Whew, but it was good to be in the running again!

III

MALCOLM knew that smile. It made him anxious. But he had to wait until he had been towed to what was called the little den before he could put the question. And then it came.

“What the mischief have you been up to?”

“Oh, just that,” she said, and had her laugh out. And while she repaired the inevitable damage in front of the mirror she let him in to all that she considered he ought to know. “I’m on my feet again, Mally, and I’ve just been seeing if I’ve lost the muscles of my calves. Girling, let’s call it. It’s a most descriptive and self-conscious word. I’m still most terrifyingly young, I find.”

“Yes, I’ve noticed that,” said Malcolm, who had seen the expression on Pelham’s face during and after lunch, and in passing his room a few moments ago had heard him stumping up and down, like a sentry, on guard against his temper. Why, on such a day, — when he had been released from waiting? He hoped to God that neither of these two was going off on one

of those abrupt and foolish tangents that give the luckiest marriage a fatal jar.

But he had only just arranged himself in the proper attitude to say so when Beatrice raised an unrelenting hand. "Don't get up in the pulpit, dear old thing," she said. "I'm too new to life for lectures, not long enough out of doing my duty to be repressed. Let me alone, let me work this thing out of my system, and the flag of peace shall float over this house to-morrow. Otherwise, —"

"I'm down," said Malcolm, in a panic. "I won't even open my mouth."

She went over to him, contradictory always, and put her hand on his shoulder. "Oh, yes, you will, Mally. I've brought you in to tell me several things I want to hear you say. When everyone else had given me up and I knew they were perfectly right, *you* backed me to come through, didn't you? Well, have I lived up to your faith?"

"My dear," he said, "of course you have. I always knew you would. You've only to look at your people and the young wonder that we've seen."

"He *is* wonderful, isn't he?"

"There never was anything so wonderful."

"Oh, Mally, what can I say about him and what he means to me? I haven't a word to say. I can't even think the proper things, it's all so wonderful. I try and try, and stand quite still with my eyes shut, or hold him in my arms and hang upon his smile, — it's like a song that needs no words, the melody sings them all."

"The song of the Madonna. It's never been put to words. There isn't a language simple enough, passionate enough, glad and sad enough to fit the tune."

“Go on like that. I need it.” But, uncannily wise, she didn’t let him go on.

She stopped him. There was a note in his voice that warned her that he was reaching for his cassock, that he was going to take advantage of her appeal for praise to ask her what the dickens she had done to Pel. She didn’t want, just then, to be told about the danger of trifling. She knew it. She didn’t require any grave words about marriage and the difficult thing it was. She could read him a better sermon than he could make after all those days and nights that she’d been through. She could burst into a passionate appeal for marriage as an institution and for the retention in it of loyalty, give and take, humor that is so vitally necessary, and love, without which it is a tragedy, because she and Pelham had proved its beauty and its blessedness. She was bent on being foolish, out on a kind of holiday bat. She was just going to become the old Beatrix again as a sort of reward for her excellence, to let the girl in her go once more, for the last time, for the Romance of the thing. Good Heavens, it was natural enough.

And so she planted a kiss on his cheek and waved her hand and broke away. She wanted to be mastered with a huge stone axe and shoutings. She wanted to be gripped and flung. She was back again and full of devil. It’s only a step from ultra-civilization to the prehistoric.

And because Malcolm knew that wave of the hand his anxiety returned.

“I’m a beast,” she said, with a laugh, took up the telephone and asked for Alec Greenwood’s number. He wasn’t in at the moment. Was that a sign for her to drop that ingenious form of torture? . . . He’d

only gone out to try a new machine, a racing car? "Oh, well, will you tell Mr. Greenwood that Mrs. Pelham Franklin will be very glad if he will drive over when he gets back and bring his things for a few days' stay?"

"Greenwood?"

"Why shoot the word at me like that?" she asked, sitting on the table and swinging her legs.

"Alec Greenwood?"

"Nice boy. You remember him, I see."

"I remember that he's anything but a nice boy. Unholy young waster, that's what he is. A red rag to a bull to Pelham."

"I know, dear Mally. That's why I want him here."

He knew that he had known that smile and those cheeky rippling fingers. "Don't do it," he said, going over to her, quickly. "Today too. Don't do it. Tomorrow, any future time, but not today. I'm not anywhere near a pulpit, but I ask you not to, Bee. You've already said something to Pel that's knocked the stuffing out of him, — or you haven't said something, I don't know. And the poor devil's been waiting for today. What the mischief are you up to?"

"Just that. I told you, Mally."

"But — Greenwood! Pel has a complex about Greenwood. It's impish, that's what it is."

She laughed again. "When did you learn about girls?"

"I don't care what happens to me," he said, and deliberately reached for the damned cassock. "You can kick me out for lecturing and send me home to my parrot, but I'm going to argue like Hell against this."

"Oh, well," sighed Beatrix. "Oh, well!"

And in spite of what was so irritating a form of resignation, a get on with it and fling it off your chest tone, you'll be lucky if I listen, he took his courage in both hands. It required a bit of doing. This girl, whom he loved to the end of loving. . . .

"Look here," he said. "I had a talk with Pel last night. I understand exactly what his mood is. If I were standing in his shoes today mine would be the same. You've done this thing to perfection through all its stages. But hasn't he? You've not been all alone in this, you know. The tendency is to think that a man has nothing to do but look on or play about, when his wife goes through all this. Some men may be made like that, I don't envy them if they are, but not Pel. He's been through every minute phase of sensitive feeling, with all the agony as well as joy. And if you've come down today to a new beginning he has too. It's a touch and go moment in both your lives, my dear, in the life of marriage. It's a cross-road. Hurt his pride, belittle his share in this, let him think that now you've got the baby he's the second fiddle, in fact trifle and play the fool with a delicate and highstrung imagination, convalescent after all its pains and anticipations, and you may break the tiny thread that binds a marriage. For God's sake, don't do that just to indulge in a temperamental spree. If all this means nothing but a lone man's incoherence, does it mean anything that I have faith in you?"

"Anything? Everything," she answered. "I wish you hadn't thought of saying that." And she slid off the table, went over to the window and stood there with her hands behind her back.

Had he won? Had he been inspired to say any-

thing that touched the note of mercy in her soul? And it was mercy that he'd had to touch because, in marriage, new, like this one, made in love, it was the woman who had the power to hurt. What is a man's vanity but the coating round his heart?

All that he had said was good, and she agreed with it. And the wind up of his appeal shook her scheme. No one, not her people, not Aunt Honoria, certainly not Brownie, not even Pelham knew her so well as Malcolm did. She would be led a thousand miles by half a kindness but a battering ram couldn't push her the eighth of an inch. All the same . . . there was that niggling little grudge, that bubble of disappointment, that infinitesimal sense of grievance. He had gone away at the moment when she had needed him most. She had sent him, perfectly true, but he had left her. Why shouldn't she pay him out a little — it was really only a game. It was only the girl in her that was leading up to romance. She only wanted to see what Pelham was made of. He'd enjoy it all as much as she. She wouldn't be terrifyingly young forever. And wasn't the great day hers as well as his? Malcolm, now that she came to think of it, had argued only in favour of Pelham, although he'd praised her for the way that she'd come through. Well, of all the . . .

Seizing upon this fatal error which provided her with just the excuse that she needed, she wheeled round and spoke. "Thank you, dear old Mally," she said gravely. "I shall memorize your sermon for future use. One of these days you must write a book on marriage. A bachelor always sees the best of the game. And now I think we ought to go and spread

ourselves among the family. There'll be disgruntled faces if we don't."

And out she went, and there was something in her smile . . .

IV

As to Greenwood.

According to Malcolm, generally inclined to be very kindly in his criticisms of young men, here was a most unholy waster, about whom Pelham had a complex, because he was young and was still in love with Beatrix.

There are many definitions of this drastic term, and nearly all of them are wrong. The one that gets nearest to accuracy, perhaps, is that which interprets the average unholy waster as a youth born several centuries late, or fifty years in advance of his time. Greenwood belonged, though Malcolm might never surmount his fixed idea and admit it, to the born late type, and was, therefore, looked at and judged by the modern point of view an impossible person, a danger to the community, with several criminal tendencies which argued the use of a strait-jacket or deportation to the wilds of Africa, where he could paint himself into a resemblance to a barber's pole, dance himself into a condition of unbelievable ecstasy under the hideous influence of gin and Tom-Tom, and occupy whatever spare time was left over in fighting, — all of which, primeval as it sounds, rather aptly described what had been found much nearer the heart of things

than the wilds of Africa during the four years of the war. By his astonished parents, his outraged schoolmasters, the unimaginative people at his university and every policeman on the road he was completely misunderstood. Which was natural.

From the age of four he barked the shins and broke the hearts of all the nurses who entered the parental house with as much sanity as they ever have, and left it, very quickly, almost mad. A very pretty boy with the curly hair and beatific smile of a Rubens angel, old world grace and easy Embassy manners, he won the confidence of all women as easily as a financial goldbrick merchant, or a Jewish dealer in fake antiques. He lied with a Washington expression, looked himself out of evidence that would have meant the Black Cap to boys with less wide eyes, and had as much natural liking for hot water as a dipsomaniac in a Turkish bath. He was a poker sharp at ten, a connoisseur of cigars and wine at thirteen, and a regular attendant at boxing matches and an intimate friend of racing touts long before he used a razor. By which period in an already checkered career he had been expelled from several schools because of an inherent disability to conform to law and order, had had large bills paid by a most bewildered father, and gone in and out of several love episodes with a quite uninjured heart. He had thrived on trouble and had grown more and more good-looking, bland and charming on punishment. He had even made several notable disappearances which had altogether stultified the well-known efficiency of the police. He had danced in a San Francisco cabaret during one of them with a partner who had kicked her way out of a revue. He had worked an elevator in the Ritz Hotel in Montreal

during another, doing great credit to the swagger uniform. And on each occasion he had wound up these youthful and high-spirited adventures with a touching impersonation of the prodigal son. A doting mother made these returns very dramatic and enjoyable. And all because he had been born out of the period in which he would have been the subject of ballads, the hero of damsels in distress and troubadours, worn armor, tilted at fellow knights and windmills, followed a king into exile, covered himself with blood and glory on famous battlefields and finally died a gallant death in the flower of his youth and been put to rest beneath a stone effigy in an Abbey. Poor lad! He had been designated for tins.

Then had come the war, the Great Adventure.

Squeezed into Yale and just about to be hurled out he was eighteen on the fatal day that was so glorious to him. Without a moment's hesitation, or a postcard to his home, he sold his cuff links and his studs, all his imported suits and boots and his very decorative collection of French water-colors and headed straight for Canada, and in the second contingent of the C.E.F. sailed with three stripes. The rest was easy. Commissioned for conspicuous bravery in the field he immediately exchanged into the Flying Corps, found himself in an element where there are no speed limits and motor cops, school-masters and kill-joy fanatics and passed from glory to glory, from hospital to hospital, from decoration to decoration. He had returned to knighthood and the merry joust. He had flown clean back into his rightful place in history. And as to the necessary damsels in distress, these he found, during the brief leaves that he invariably made elastic, in Piccadilly and the Rue de Rivoli. A.P.M.'s became

his windmills and his troubadours were on the Music Halls. And for some reason or other which no one can explain, the bullet on which his name was certainly engraved, — a *nom de guerre* as a matter of fact — was never fired. Among the last to be demobbed and demoralized he found himself a Major on the steps of Cox's Bank with enough medals to melt into a shell case.

And then, what?

First the fatted calf, this time very fat, served with hero worship sauce and adulation. "Did you hear about my son Alec? A Major in the British service, Flying Corps. An ace, with every decoration. Wonderful, yes indeed. What's he doing now? Well . . ." Well, everything, absolutely everything, except work. Work? Rest, holiday, change of scene, amusement, all the money that was going, the best clothes, the fattest cigars, the prettiest girls, — hadn't he earned the right to these? It was an increasingly difficult question to answer, that "what's he doing now?" But very soon everybody knew. Alec, better looking than ever, better dressed than ever, with a smarter car than anyone and a far more noticeable girl, painted New York red like a finished artist. It was "here comes dear old Alec", with every hanger-on and chorus-girl as well as every débutante and every tuft-hunting matron. Major Alec Greenwood, for much longer than is usual, — one winter is the limit as rule and then you're dead — was the lion of every party, and he roared like any sucking dove to the prettiest daughters. Everyone, including, of course, his parents, paid for his medals.

But his delightful charm of manner, his endless fund of anecdote, his gift of accepting hospitality and

helping himself without the tiresome formality of being asked, his boundless energy and high-spirits, his perfect dancing, his faultless bridge, his splendid tennis, his plus-one golf, and above all his habit of laughter, made a most unusual screen to hide the dear old Alec that he'd become. The world revolved round Alec Greenwood, smart Alec as disagreeable people called him now. And it must be confessed that he brought a lack of scruple to the point where it branched off on the Sing Sing road. His home was simply the door that fitted his permanent latch-key, though, when he happened to meet her, he was very sweet to his mother. He was full of praise and wonder at the way his father worked. A good old thing, his father, whom he held in great esteem. Probably the most successful lawyer in New York, old boy, and, by Jove, the father of Alec Greenwood. Eh? A burst of laughter and another drink.

It was at this stage of his career that he met Beatrix. One of his respectable evenings, at the Colony Club. At the very sight of her as she entered the ballroom with Aunt Honoria and caught his eye on her sophisticated gaze-round of inspection, he crashed. For the first time in his life he forgot that he was Alec, and something went clean through that pachydermatous hide to his heart. Every night for a month he achieved her presence, — opera, dance; theatre, dance; horse-show, dance; Midnight frolic, dance; dinner, dance. The giddy round. She drew him like a magnet, reduced him to miraculous humility, filled his sleep with poetry and music, put him on his feet on solid earth. She was *the* damsel in distress, although there was not a girl on earth farther away from such a state; the golden girl for whom he had flung himself

at armored knights and died. He became Sir Alexander de Greenwoode in a flash. And she liked him and encouraged him and flirted with him, was cold and kind; was even a little touched at being the one to bring this notorious ace down with such a clatter. And just for that ecstatic month he lived in dreams and was a stranger to his gang. Then came gossip, the talk about the visits to York's studio, the disclosure of the secret marriage to Pelham Franklin and Alec, though with the memory of having been steeped in a poem, went straight back into the air.

"Unholy young waster, that's what he is," said Malcolm, and he was wrong. Born late, that's what he really was, a man who had come to life among motor cars and baseball stadiums instead of caparisoned horses and tourney grounds for knights.

That was Greenwood.

V

AND then there was all the business of the family departure, — the Vanderdyke family departure; the old man, who was really in the prime of life, straining every nerve and everybody's patience to leave at a certain minute in order to reach home at a certain minute, when all the while he knew as well as everybody else did that the market value of his minute was as low as that of the German mark.

The car had been ordered for twenty minutes past five, and both the chauffeur and the gentleman of no occupation who broke the gentle monotony of being

driven about by condescending to open the door of the car, knew better than to be a second late. But at five o'clock the fuss began. First there was the inevitable comparing of watches. Then the "my dear, don't you think you ought to go and get ready now?" Then the commencement of the short-haired terrier movements, — from the footman with the coat and hat to the foot of the stairs and back; from the clock on the hall mantelpiece to the one in the library, and from the Major's watch via the foot of the stairs to the footman with the coat and hat; from that implacable man to Mrs. Vanderdyke, and the repetition of "My dear, don't you think you ought to go and get ready now?" and on to Aunt Honoria, Mrs. McKenzie, Mrs. Beamish and the Major's watch, back to the clock on the hall mantelpiece, the one in the library, and via the footman with the coat and hat to the foot of the stairs. The compelling touch on the elbow, the pointing finger to the face of the watch, the anxious and hastening smile, the little run to the window, the listening ear, the devil's tatoo on the tops of tables and the backs of chairs, the reminding cough, the humming of a long dead march. Then the subtle alteration of the formula to "My dear, I think you ought to get ready now", to "My dear, you really must get ready now", to "My dear, do please go and get ready now", and finally to "My dear, we shall be terribly late." And, at last, the transference of terrier movements from the footman who no longer held the coat and hat, the clocks on the hall mantelpiece and the library table, the foot of the stairs and the various places where the several completely indifferent women were determined to have the last word to the doorstep, the gravel drive, and round and round the car. Oh, my God, these meaning-

lessly punctual men, — and these determined last word women.

Mrs. Vanderdyke with the not jealous exactly but perhaps slightly resentful air of a Queen Mother remembering at the last minute all the important things that she had forgotten to say during that much too long visitation and demanding everyone in sight to collect her unnecessary belongings that she immediately put down in a place from which she moved away so that they had to be re-collected and when, at last, in the car and all ready with the gracious bow and smile for the metaphorical newspaper snapshot man, uttering the well-known cry of distress because a gold bag, or a bead bag or some fool thing had been left behind, which meant a general scuffling round to be followed by the certain “Oh, dear me, how stupid. I have it, after all.”

Mrs. McKenzie, with the thing she called a hat at a rakish angle, making farewell jokes and laughing loudly, calling out last words above the general din to Beatrix and Pelham who didn't want to hear them; advising books to read and Exhibitions to see and music to hear and plays to avoid, and just as she was about to be heaved into the car turning with a “By the way, I can't go before I tell you the latest about the President”, or Mr. Harvey, or whoever it was, and treading on the agitated feet of the wretched Vanderdyke; uttering a pea-hen scream and in the middle of an apology remembering, yes and telling, still another thing they ought to hear.

For the rest, Aunt Honoria to the last minute silent, with one hand on Beatrix's shoulder and the other on Pelham's arm, and then “My dearest girl”, “My darling Auntie”, “Au revoir, my boy”, “So beastly

sorry you're leaving us", and that was all. A rare woman. The Major letting off clichés, pretending to kiss Pelham and going through all the tricks of the elderly gentleman whose mother had made the fatal mistake of saying that he had more genuine humor than the great comedians of the stage. And finally May Beamish with a smiling "Goodbye, Mrs. Franklin", and a masterly, "So long, Pel", and a yard of excellent leg.

The quiet oozing of the door, the thick purring as of a great tom-cat, the grind of gravel, the heavy regal movement and — peace.

"So endeth the Great Day," said Beatrix, holding out the handkerchief that she'd been waving for anyone to take. Is there no milliner brain ingenious enough to invent a place for a pocket in a woman's clothes?

Pelham had to take it because Malcolm had discreetly disappeared. "Endeth," he echoed. "Don't you believe it," and he seized her hand.

"I don't," she said. "I only said so on behalf of that carload, whose interest in it is over. It's just going to begin for me."

"Is it? You mean —" And he bent to kiss her, blazing with hope and love. And got the lobe of an ear and a laugh. But he held her and led her through the hall and out into the sun on the verandah.

If he went on like that, the imp and Alec Greenwood could go to blazes together.

"Now then, let's have this out," he said, going strong.

"What out?" with great encouragement.

"The thing you said before lunch."

"Good Heavens, that was a week ago."

"A month, a year. I'm sorry, but I'm glad that ghastly family business is over. It's no good pretending you've forgotten. Or if you have, and you were just pulling my leg to hear it snap, you ought to be shot for it."

"Why? If you hold me so tight I shall probably die without shooting."

And the fool let her go. Why doesn't someone teach men about women? She was pleading to be hurt.

"Because you've put me through the rottenest day I've ever had. That's why. You sent me away and I went. There's no getting over it. If you didn't want me to go you'd only to say so. You don't think that I wanted to go, do you?"

"That's the point," she said.

"What's the point?"

"Precisely that. You've got it."

"I'm damned if I know what you mean."

That was bad. That was weak. He should have said "I don't give a damn what you mean" and shouted, got red in the face, kicked one of those nice cane chairs over, caught her roughly in his arms and kissed her breath away. As it was, the imp and Alec Greenwood would have to be retained, unless he got back into anger and indignation again and kept there.

"If you ever did know what I mean," she said, giving him another chance, "we shouldn't be having this frightful row on such a day as this."

"Frightful row?" he said, amazed.

"Well, what do you call it, then? You grab hold of me, you ruin a perfectly new frock, you march me out here like a culprit, you bruise both my shoulders and yell at the top of your voice."

"I'm most awfully sorry," he said.

And although she was close enough to be kissed and both her hands were clasped behind her back, he let the chance go by, and stood bewildered, like an overgrown boy. He had never yelled at the top of his voice, except at a drunken coolie. And as to bruising her shoulders . . .

Oh, how maddening it was. Why couldn't he understand the language? Why couldn't he pick up his cues? She was saying one thing and meaning another. It was all so simple. It was girl, that's all.

And just as she was going to cry a little and see what that would do,—the lowest of the feminine tricks to which she would have condescended to please Malcolm and be very generous,—Pelham Vanderdyke Franklin was wheeled between them by the woman who had as much soul as the figurehead of a ship, and as much sympathy as a lobster. And, at the sight of that sleeping wonder, Beatrix changed from a girl into a reasonable being. And as she bent over one side of the perambulator and Pelham took the other, the hard-bosomed woman moved away. This was after all her twenty-second infant!

"Ssssh!" went Beatrix, holding up an anxiously warning finger, but speaking all the same. "Isn't he, oh, isn't he a darling, Pel?"

The parental grin shifted all the bewilderment from Pelham's face. "I should think he jolly well is," he said.

"Look at those little lashes, I ask you!"

"Lashes? I didn't think a baby started lashes until he was at least a year old."

"*Other* babies."

"Of course, I see what you mean." He squared his

shoulders and slanted his head. No one could do him out of a certain amount of the credit.

And with untranslatable tenderness and the urge of maternal passion she bent still lower and touched the little cheek with her lips.

“Look out. You’ll wake him.”

“No, I shan’t. I know him too well.” And when she looked up her eyes were swimming, and all the story was in them of the months that he had lived with her, — all hers then, unshared.

And with an admiration and a gratitude that it was hopeless to attempt to say, Pelham picked up her hand and kissed it. She was his love, his wife, he adored her. She was even more wonderful than this sleeping child to whom, during all those months, she had given herself in devotion.

But when the baby stirred, and, in soothing him with her hand he caught her finger, a stab of jealousy, red hot, brought Pelham into speech. “Don’t ever let him come between us, Bee. You were mine before you were his.”

And then the figurehead bore down to do her duty. “Time he went in,” she said, and wheeled the perambulator away.

There they were again, facing each other. And all that this man had to do to end the argument, to send the flag of peace flying mast high on the roof top, to drive that imp away with his tail between his legs and render Alec Greenwood as lifeless as a last month’s magazine, was to forget the husband and be the lover.

But if he knew nothing about women he knew a million times less about girls. “Don’t let that boy come between us,” he repeated, as if the first time wasn’t foolish enough.

Good Lord, she couldn't let that go by. It was far too silly; the *tu quoque* far too obvious. "Not this boy," she said. "But now that I'm down again and bursting with life, there are plenty of others."

A car roared up the drive, back-firing, and with its throttle out. If it had been mechanically possible to have added to the din its driver would have done so. "There's Alec Greenwood, for instance. Greenwood so suggestive of spring."

"Greenwood? . . . By God, if you . . ."

"Well?" And once more she stood close enough to be taken and kissed and have her shoulders bruised, and be shouted at, with her hands behind her back.

But out came Greenwood, glossy and eager and ready for all the fun he could get.

And it was too late. . . . These husbands, — why don't they understand?

VI

AND then, what?

Well, the three inevitable reactions. Greenwood's dramatic pause as he strode hungrily towards Beatrix, by which, well within ten seconds, he intended to convey a sort of struck dumbness at the sight of her again; and then the shooting-out of both hands. He was a both-hand man. And then the "I . . . I . . ." and the deferential bend of the parting-less head, because what was the use of words. All carried out with something, but only something, of the insincere sincerity of the actor, who, whether hopeless, or just bad, on the stage, always overacts in private life, and

is possessed of the belief that he has only to touch a woman's hand and register complete abasement to turn her heart over and be bothered with a victim. It can't be done by any other kind of — is man the word? And then the slow return to consciousness and the eye-tour of admiration and the longing to possess from hair to eyes, and from eyes to mouth, and all about the neck and shoulders. . . .

By which time Beatrix thought it wise to speak. And so the "Oh, hullo, Alec", and the rather stiff drawing away and firm recovery of hands, and the instant making of a contrast, to the overwhelming disadvantage of the too close man, whose eye was trained to look through serge and flannel, silk or whatever else was worn.

And the blazingly jealous husband, outraged, glowering, without pretence of politeness, with his gruff "How are you", which hoped to Heaven you weren't.

It was all over in less than a minute, — one of the well-known marriage minutes. And before Greenwood, who never would have confessed to himself that he was amazed to have been invited, but was all the same, could do more than open up with the "How Splendid you look. How Kind of you to have me. How Wonderful it is to . . ." Pelham had muttered the usual thing about having to go and look after it didn't matter what in order to prevent himself from assault and battery, and be alone to curse.

But when he slammed the door of his den and startled the staring heads on the walls almost into batting their glass eyes, Malcolm got up and put both feet into it.

"Ah," he said. "Greenwood."

At which, there being so uncanny an appropriateness in this remark, Pelham drew up short. "Greenwood? What the devil made you drag in Greenwood? If you mean that Greenwood's here, he is . . . And if you asked him what the hell did you do it for without speaking to me?"

"My dear chap . . ."

"I've nothing against Greenwood. Nothing at all in his own dog-kennel. Let him live as he likes. It's his life. But I'll be damned if I want him anywhere within a million miles of Beatrix, so you may as well know that now."

He was as certain as death that Mally would no more have invited that rotten Greenwood to his house than forge a cheque, but as he loved Beatrix far too well to swear at her, or not well enough, — it's open to argument — someone had to be sworn at, and Malcolm was obviously the one. Wasn't he his best friend? And whatever the pacifistic person may say about swearing there are moments in the life of every man, especially if he is married, when it's the essential safety valve. Every suppressed damn goes to the making of an ulcer.

And it was because Malcolm was his best friend and also a man of keen imagination that he put both feet into it, deliberately. It is possible to find unselfishness in this world. Besides, Malcolm had already exhausted all his own swear words on the subject of Greenwood and it would help him considerably to hear Pelham's stock of oaths. So, one way and another, it all fitted in.

And so after Greenwood had been flung from man to man and very properly mangled, Pelham showed that he had returned to normal, without having com-

mitted an irretrievable act, by lighting a pipe. For several minutes there was silence, while Pelham, utterly at a loss to understand the meaning of this natural but distressing tangent, stalked up and down, and Malcolm, equally at a loss and desperately anxious, watched him from a comfortable chair. One can be more concentratedly anxious in a comfortable chair than any other.

Finally Pelham came out with Malcolm's original question. "What the mischief is she up to?"

And Malcolm gave him Beatrix's own answer. "Just that."

"Well, old man, it all beats me."

"Me too."

"I don't know a damned thing about women and I know less than ever about Beatrix."

"So do I."

"And this is supposed to be the great day. Who's great day? So far it's been the family's. Now it's going to be Greenwood's. Where do I come in? I told you there was something in her smile, and that I'd been trying to think. Just before lunch she told me what's been in the back of her head. Has she said anything to you?"

"Yes, — but nothing I could put my teeth into."

"And the more she tells me about it the less I see what she means. I went away. I was told to go away. But I went. I ought not to have done what I was told. . . . Can you make head or tail out of that? And so she's holding me off. She's making me feel like a lodger in my own house. She's got a grudge against me for doing what she didn't want me to do and I loathed doing and only did because she wanted me to do it. If that isn't enough to make an ordinary

man walk head downwards with his feet on the ceiling, what is, — that's what I want someone to tell me."

"Well, I can't," said Malcolm.

"No," said Pelham, with a sort of laugh. "You don't know a single damn thing about women."

And neither of them was required to do so, then, at that stage of the difficult game. What they needed to know was something, however little, about a girl, which was very different.

So on they blundered, going round and round like squirrels in a cage, both of them in love and one of them, who had the right, passionately and supremely desiring, slap up against the cross-road, without knowing it. Inspiration was missing. Imagination led them into jungles instead of out into the open. Both could only think of dealing with this crisis with tenderness and sensitiveness and respect and what were needed, if either had been struck suddenly with a mere glimmer of insight into the queer nature of girl, and this girl, just on her feet once more and terrifyingly young, were a huge stone axe and shoutings. Romance as the reaction to practicality.

Finally, Malcolm gave his friend the wrong advice, — advice is always wrong. "Go out," he said, "and abase yourself. Say that you are frightfully sorry that you went away. Ask her to forgive you, and I don't see what on earth she can do but forget her grudge and carry on from there."

But Pelham saw, poor devil, and pretty soon.

He went out, armed with humbleness, stirred deeply by a great love, passionately desiring, and found Beatrix standing on the doorstep in the evening sun. Alec Greenwood was out of hearing, tinkering with his back-firing, open-throttled, speed-breaking, obvi-

ously Greenwood car, better looking than ever, better dressed than ever, and as unscrupulous as never before.

And when Beatrix felt a touch on her elbow she turned with a pathetic eagerness to the simple, honest, most devoted man whom she had never been so glad to own, so proud to belong to, or so eager to love. Does he, — oh, does he understand? It's all so simple. Just girl stuff, — nothing else.

And this is what she got. "Bee," he said. "Bee darling, I'm most frightfully sorry. When you tell me to do a thing again, I'll never do it. . . ." Fool, what a fool!

An angry look, a burst of laughter and a whirl away. "All right, Alec. I've changed my mind. Come on, let's drive out like the devil. And if your noisy collection of old iron leaves the earth, we'll fly."

And in she sprang, and in went Greenwood, seeing fun. And there stood Pelham Franklin, who didn't understand, listening to the open throttle till the hideous sound of it was gone.

A great day! — and a chance missed, and a cross-road.

PART V

I

THE Chinese have many sound sayings. One of them is that "if you hurt your foot before four o'clock make up your mind to bark your shins before going to bed."

And this came into the rather angry mind of May Beamish late that afternoon when, having returned to a red-hot New York with Elizabeth McKenzie, who had to attend a meeting of some sort after dinner, she found an unstamped letter waiting for her on the hall table. Having hurt her foot severely when the Franklin door was slammed upon it by Beatrix, she was not in the least surprised to bark her shins, so to speak, against a note in the all-too familiar handwriting of Valentine Beamish.

She had driven into the City in an open Packard. Mrs. McKenzie was one of those enthusiastic motorists who never feel that they have really been wholly out unless their eyes are filled with dust and their lungs with other people's carbon. The day had been hot and cloudless and the road through the suburbs had been packed tight with every known machine, a long, slow procession of air seekers, most of them in shirt sleeves. Like all English women who are perfectly certain that some sinister trick has been played by the Gulf Stream if the thermometer touches sixty-eight, May had wilted in the good American June sunshine which had sent

the glass up to eighty-two, and she drew a laugh from her dishevelled but imperturbable hostess on arrival by saying, "Oh, my Lord, I feel exactly like a spoonful of Brand's essence." And she almost slithered down the three fashionable steps of the re-fronted narrow house which had not yet been captured by "Immaculata" the milliner, or "Shilluski," the maker of habits.

Too late for tea, it was precisely the moment for a cocktail, and begging that it might be sent up to her bathroom May went immediately to that harbor of resuscitation to bathe her barked shin. In water as cold as she could get it and a bottle of Morny's bath salts to give it a sting, our wee friend opened her loving husband's letter.

"Dear old thing," it ran, in a hand unused to a pen, "the picture postcard that you sent me of the skyscrapers behind the *Aquitania* caught me at a moment when everything here seemed to be low-lying and despondent. So I've jumped over to gaze up at those heights and renew my acquaintance with you. I'm stopping at a pub, well called The Biltmore because it is undoubtedly more built than the other gigantic places round it, and I shall be honored and delighted if you will dine with me tonight. The man who thought that he might as well take this chit mustered up just enough energy to tell me that you will be back from the country in time to ring me up. Please do, and if it doesn't suit you to peck with me tonight lunch with me tomorrow. V. B."

In a thoughtless moment, then, she had put her address on that inspiring postcard, and this was the result. Valentine Beamish was the last man on earth who should leave his own country or bother her in her new surroundings. Essentially English he would be

a lost spirit away from his Club, his book-maker and his golf course, while she was in the precarious position of a fishing smack, which, having caught an alluring glimpse of harbor, was struggling in the blanket of a thick sea-fog. Beatrix would have been delighted at the simile.

At the same time it was not her way to dodge the inevitable. Almost before a tooth had to be filled she seated herself in the dentist's chair. She would meet Valentine at once and move Heaven and earth to induce him to return to his well-loved Piccadilly on the first ship that was to sail. There were two insurmountable reasons for this quick decision. One was that the presence of a husband at that difficult moment in her crusade was quite fatal. Whatever dramatic interest she had been able to surround herself with in Pelham's eyes, — and it wasn't much — lay in the fact that she was so alone, as well as so tiny and so courageous. And the other that she was pretty certain that the keeping of the gallant and impecunious Valentine at the Biltmore would make a deep hole in her little store of dollars. As a soldier, required no longer by a grateful Government, he would have nothing but medals to rattle in his pocket.

And so, after the usual struggle with a telephone operator to be connected with the desired number, and the usual brusque disinclination on the part of a girl at the hotel, who really didn't give a damn what sort of reputation she tarred it with, to believe that any Major Beamish was staying there, May, little short of a gibbering lunatic, got on. But she was answered by a man with a strong cockney accent who said that the Major was 'avin a bath, but that the message should be conveyed. . . . Which meant, as plain

as a pikestaff, that there were two men in the country for her to keep. "How exactly like Val. Beamish to have brought a valet to put the cuff links in his only shirt," she said, addressing the group of curly-haired cherubs that hung over her bed. But she laughed all the same. It had its funny side.

Dressing poor and wearing only her wedding ring, the uncomfortably hot and extremely worried May went in to see her hostess and explain the contretemps. She found Mrs. McKenzie in her muddled boudoir, lying on a sofa covered with pamphlets, wrapped in a much stained dressing gown, with the telephone on her chest. Between loud howls of laughter at her own extravagant phrases she was obviously summing up the question of France's attitude towards Germany to a member of a Woman's Political Club. With growing impatience, but a sweet persistent smile, May was forced to listen to her views, which amazingly enough, were sound. "My dear, whatever you may say, the Germans forced the war to bleed us white, every mother's son of us. She's utterly unrepentant and is filled with gas and aeroplanes. She's teaching all her young to hate the French with a deep consuming fury, and unless England and Belgium stop France's fear of another attack by entering into a binding treaty Europe goes into the pit as sure as death. Excuse me a moment, darling. Yes, my dear?"

Whereupon May told her little story. "You're busy to-night," she said, "so you won't mind if I go out to dinner, will you? It's a great nuisance and of course I would so much rather be with you, but the truth is that I promised to spend an evening with a nice woman who was on board the *Aquitania* with me. And this is the only one she's got before she goes

away. I won't be late. Break up the meeting, won't you, and come into my room and tell me all about it."

One of the yellowest of all yellow taxis, but one that had been blue the day before, drove her bumpily to the Biltmore. During the adventurous journey which sent her heart into her mouth several times at the narrow shaves from permanent disuse she congratulated herself upon having been wise enough to lie herself out of an inconvenient husband. She knew that if she had confessed to the sudden arrival of Valentine Mrs. McKenzie would never have rested until she had possessed herself of him, — a new toy, a new lion, virgin earth for her to till. Besides, she did not want the remotest connubiality in that nice room of hers.

At the top of the stairs which had been peeled of their carpet stood, conspicuously, a tall, slight, graceful man in a much-waisted dinner jacket. An interested and rather whimsical smile was in his deep-set eyes, his black short hair which was so well groomed as almost to have lost its most annoying kink, his small moustache beneath a Wellingtonian nose made a thin dark line on a short upper lip, and a lean strong jaw seemed still to smart from a recent application of a Regent Street astringent. He didn't see the little soul from the Rectory, to whom he had given all he had to give before going out to make a six foot mound upon the breast of France, until her hand was on his arm. And then he looked down and his smile changed to one that was even more whimsical than it had been before.

"Oh, hullo, Kitten," he said evenly. "Who'd have thought of our croppin' up here?"

II

THEY went into the place designed for summer husbands, — those lonely business martyrs who are only able to join their wives and children in the country over the week-end and do their best to keep away depression during intervening evenings by dining with summer friends. There were ferns and fountains, discreet corners, and insufficient space for dancing so that dancing was impossible but it was necessary to hold a partner close, and a lavish and perspiring band. The open roof gave a view of the same star-spangled sky that hung over all the Hamptons, and the rugged rocks of Maine, and if the air did not contain the cool sea tang of those nice places it came, what there was of it, from very willing electric fans. Cheerfulness, however forced, prevailed at all the tables, which managed to be wet in spite of the costliest of all the laws, and it was obvious that there were many pretty women in New York to take pity on the working man.

From a one-night knowledge of the place Valentine had seen the force of reserving a table on the edge of the open square, and to this he led the way. The band was in one of its lugubrious spasms at the moment, so that all the husbands present were trying to forget their bachelorhood in the arms of kind though week-day partners, and no one, new to New York, would have sensed the underlying sadness of the scene, although the sob of the Hawaiian music must have moved a gargoyle.

A dozen lines of laughter appeared at the corners of Beamish's eyes as he flipped out his undried napkin and faced his wife. "I've ordered dinner," he said, "but I don't in the least know what you like, so I'm rather in a funk about it. Quaint and rather amusing to think that although we've been married eight years I know as little about your likes and dislikes as any other stranger."

"Yes," said May, "isn't it? When you weren't fighting you were in hospital and so . . ." She shrugged one small round shoulder. What was quaint and amusing to her was rather the way he described that fact than the fact itself. "Any other stranger" summed it up so well. Theirs had certainly been a khaki marriage par excellence. Examining him closely she found at once that although he was less good-looking than when she had seen him last, a considerable time ago, he was infinitely more attractive, — she almost used the word distinguished. He had lost the determination to be blasé that is cultivated by every undergraduate, — the over-polite insolence, the effort to appear effete, the loud mechanical workings to prevent the bubbling up of irresistible interest, the straining after an epigrammatical turn of phrase. He was no longer self-conscious. He had, in fact, emerged from Oxford swaddling clothes, and had shed his college colors for those of his country. Even St. Paul, who deals with so many travelers, would be able to pronounce him English without glancing at his passport. He might have been thirty-five rather than the thirty that he was. She liked the man that he had grown into very much indeed. The word stranger was the right one.

As for Beamish he said what came into his mind

about this small, imperturbable person out loud, very simply. "You're marvellously the same, Kitten. You don't look a day older than when I saw you that first night at Rutland Gate. Nice house, that, and how good your dear old aunt used to be to all the cubs she encouraged. How've you done it? By takin' things as philosophically as usual?" He still retained the paradoxically illiterate trick of discarding his final gs.

The soup came, jellied.

"I dunno," she answered, purring a little. "I sleep well, I suppose. Then too, never being able to forget my early training, I don't expect much and never fret when I don't get it. A better scheme than massage to keep the lines away. When did you come over?"

"I landed yesterday. By jove, this band can play! I came over steerage on the *Majestic*."

"What!" She nearly performed the nose trick with her soup. "Steerage? . . . You!"

"Why not? Needs must when the War Office drives. You see, when Lloyd George made a handsome present of Ireland to the Sinn Fein people we were marched home and turned loose on the streets. Since you came into that little legacy from your good aunt, who deserves and I'm certain has been given a comfortable corner in a better world, and were generous enough to scratch my paltry allowance to you, I managed to save a bit. I shoved it all on the Derby winner in a moment of light-headed desperation, and am better off at this moment than I've been since the second year of the war. I won a thousand pounds, and after I had paid my cigarette bill and few other things including a long-sufferin' tailor for uniforms, I stood up worth six hundred of the best. The only job I was offered in London was rather beyond my

mental capacity, — it was to play the cymbals in an ex-officers' band on the island in the middle of Cockspur Street — the only instrument I've mastered is the Jew's harp, — and then your postcard came, re-addressed from Dublin, and here I am to try my luck."

Oh, that was good news, if you like! Then he had not turned up to poach on her preserves and live in luxury on a reluctant wife. She warmed beneath the blow. The Valentine that she had known had certainly grown up.

"You take my breath away," she said, with that occasional naïveté of hers. "Do you mind if I say that I thought you'd come over to live on me?"

"Yes," he said. "As a matter of fact I do, rather. There are only a few of us like that, y'know."

"I'm awfully sorry, Val. I offer you my most humble apologies." And she held out a really repentant hand. She was in for an evening of misjudgments.

He held it, warmly, and bowed. "Thanks," he said.

And so they knew where they were. They were both workers. They were both members of the great army of would-be-wage-earners filled with the laudable ambition to grub up whatever was going in a much picked over field. Excellent and difficult.

Cold chicken and salad, pommes Maître d'Hotel.

The band, greatly daring and possibly a little desecrating even in these most careless times, was making a fox trot of "Nearer, my God, to Thee." Everybody danced, and nobody knew what it was.

"Who's the man who answered the telephone?"

Beamish chuckled. "A very old friend of mine," he answered. "He gives his name as 'Arry 'Arris and has been my bat-man for five years. A most

coaxin' hand with a pair of tops and gets more into a suit-case than seems quite fair."

"Did you come across him here?"

"No. I brought him over. He thought he'd like to see what America has to offer, too."

To the practical May, whose school had been a hard one, the process of allowing oneself to be followed by stray dogs, humane as it was, seemed more than merely Quixotic at the best of times. But under these conditions . . .

Beamish read her gesture perfectly. "I know," he said. "The broke leading the broke, but it isn't quite so comic as it looks. Harris has been as good as a mother to me ever since he joined my Squadron as a mechanic. I have the greatest respect and affection for him, and he'd willingly go to Hell for me. In fact he has, often. When we were disbanded he had nowhere to go to because his three brothers had gone west early in the war, and his wife had died givin' birth to another feller's baby. And so, as he wasn't above goin' steerage as some of his sort would have been, I invited him to join me and he made a delightful companion. He plays Bezique like a pro, has a keen sense of fun, becomes more and more cheerful when everything is rottenest and possesses the rarest of all the gifts — gratitude. I wish I could remember some of his epoch-makin' remarks as we sat in the Zoo of the *Majestic* being examined by the first class passengers — many of whom it was easy to recognize as the people we fought for and whose pockets we filled. Oh, and by the way, before I forget it, will you make a note of our address after tomorrow? The Y.M.C.A., West 57th Street. Harris doesn't think the Biltmore can hold a candle to that admirable club."

She liked this new man and his utter simplicity, his cool and ungrumbling acceptance of things as they had hit him, and his rather unique way of snowing brown as he couldn't snow white. The war, which had knocked the world edgeways, and the peace which had found out the weak spots in the universal character, had turned the undergraduate Valentine that she had known at Rutland Gate into a man who had won his Master of Arts in the University of life. But for her intense and natural longing for luxury as the reaction of the respectable pauperism of her early life she would be glad to claim him as her husband, and set up a partnership in the street of adventure. That is if he had the remotest desire to be claimed after her cold-blooded breakage of their marriage vows and her frank, and not to say brutal notice, written as far back as 1916, as to the evaporation of their khaki ecstasy. And this she doubted. There was nothing in his manner that suggested the remotest spark of affection, or anything like a desire to be nearer to her than the other side of a dinner table. He was courteous and friendly; interested as a man would be who met a woman again who was the little sister of a buried friend. And being a woman her vanity was piqued at this attitude, although it was essential to her scheme,—one that had been laid very flat that afternoon by Beatrix. However, great is the blessing of optimism. She might even now catch Franklin on the hop. Undoubtedly there had been a rift within the lute . . .

And so this peculiar evening wound itself slowly out. Their unstrained conversation, continually interrupted by the energetic band, and the almost incessant and wholly insane wobbling of the closely jammed joy-seekers, went from personalities into topics of general

discussion, — Lloyd George and his divine right to blunder, the gamin impudence of his egregious jackal, Swollenhead, the amazing patience of their courageous countrymen, the certain knowledge of France that she would be attacked again unless England and Belgium guaranteed her future, the pathetic faith of America in the Atlantic as a means of protection from the decay and disease of Europe. Finally the pause which lengthened into silence, the wandering eyes, the smothered yawn.

“Will you see me home?”

“Of course.”

“Let’s walk.”

And then the street, the clanging trolley car, the soliciting taxicab, a resuscitating breeze that parted the curtains of the overheated city, a ceiling of stars above the high gulley, a slouching figure on the hunt for fruitful garbage cans, spots of color in the lighted windows of interior decorators, passing cars, the smart McKenzie house.

“Well,” said Beamish, “a jolly evenin’. How awfully nice of you to come.”

“How awfully nice of you to have me,” said May. “Let’s do it again next week.”

“Nothin’ I should enjoy more.” He held out a hand, and the light of the lamp above the wrought iron door showed the lines of the new whimsical smile at the corners of his eyes.

“So long, Val.”

“So long, Kitten.”

“Good luck, old boy.”

“Thanks, I need it. All good luck to you.”

And when the door was opened by the disobliging man, Major Valentine Beamish waved his hand.

And Mrs. Valentine Beamish waved back.
Curious thing, war.

III

“NOT a spark in the old fire,” said Beamish to himself, strolling back. “Never was much of a fire even when I put the match of youthful sentiment to it. It never really blazed. Her daintiness and delicate color, courage, and the fact that she had suffered, worked on my imagination. It seemed then, when life was as good as over, to be the chivalrous thing to give her my name and whatever it might be worth. There was no other girl at the time. We all wanted to insure the fact, I suppose, that there was someone to own us, a precious particular person who would receive our identification discs as soon after the War Office telegram as possible, and carry on. If she were broke to the wide and the ordinary flaccid, make the worst of it, parasitical girl, we should have to go through the farcical tragedy of a war marriage, despising the whole business and losing the fine edge of self-respect. As it is there is a perfectly reasonable mutual agreement to recognize the mistake and go our own ways. She has her own money, such as it is, as well as ambition and individualism. When she wants to marry again she’ll let me know and I shall provide the law with the regulation dirtiness. When I do, as I hope I shall, if the Bluebird flies my way, I shall put it to her and the same routine will follow. It might easily be a jolly sight worse. As to the Bluebird, that darling Ameri-

can girl who nursed at Amiens, who cured me of one wound and gave me another, — my God, I'll find her if I have to walk over every inch of this country." He gave out this statement to an echoing street and laughed at its highfalutin'. Not much of a laugh, because however melodramatic and heroic the sentiment sounded in these tuppence colored words, it was the underlying reason of his discovery of America, the urge that had sent him to the nearest ship the very moment that he was free. There was a blaze in *this* fire, and it had refused to burn itself out in spite of the five intervening years. "I'm on my uppers," he added, "and I can't ask her to marry me even if I find her, — not at once, not until I've got a job. And if I do find her and there isn't any longer that look in her eyes, or if she's married, — well, I'm used to carrying on, and there's sure to be another war. My name's on the books, and the good old W.O. will bung me a nice letter, and I shall forgive and go home. They know that. 'It's back to the Army agin, Sergeant, back to the Army agin.' " And he laughed and stuck out his chest rather comically.

All the bands in the Biltmore had ceased for the day. Those strenuous instrumentalists who thumped out music with hardly a pause for breath must be lying flat on their backs on well-earned beds. A few unattached people wandered in to get their keys and a bevy of elderly women were washing the marble floors. They are always elderly women who come out to do this thing at night, poor souls. And when, having been jerked to the topmost floor, Beamish walked a mile or two in search of his attic room without a bath, he found it filled with the reek of shag and the dolorous singing of a nasal voice.

“ Me brovar’s cut ’is blimey froat,
Me sister’s got the ’flu,
Me farver’s pawned ’is only goat,
And muvver’s time is due,
But . . . giv me the good old ’ome once more,
Give me the good old spot. . . .”

“ Well, give it to me,” said Beamish. “ Two fingers and a blob of ice.”

“ Very good, sir.” And up sprang ’Arry ’Arris from the edge of his bed, dropped the shoe that he was cleaning, flicked a salute, and brought out the smuggled bottle of Haig and Haig from its hiding place. Quick as you like.

For all his reach-me-down civilian garments, — riding up at the collar, too long in the sleeves, too short at the back with a gaping slit, too tight in the leg, the usual thing that comes off a peg and, if the most subtle care is not exercised, out of the expensive tailor’s shop — ’Arris came through as soldier. The tilt of his bull-dog jaw, the size of his feet, the work of his elbow, the donkey driver’s twist left by a sheep shearer rather than a barber on his bullet head, the ingratiating angelic expression of the old hand ready at any minute to reply, “ Not my fault, sir. Wasn’t there at the time, sir, no, sir,” the whippy action of the knees and the soapy points of the beer-accustomed moustache, all stamped the little man like the Army Service Corps brand on a mule. Not only that but the flourish with which he handed the glass to Beamish with a “ whisky ’nsodersir,” proclaimed him bat-man in the British Army.

“ Thanks,” said Beamish, tossing his hat into a chair and immediately retrieving it to hang it tenderly on a hook. “ Have one yourself, ’Arry.” It was not

friendly to put back the superfluous aitch without which he had rubbed along all his life.

“No, thank yer, sir, no, sir.” But the tip of the tongue all round the lips bespoke an enormous desire.

And so Beamish took the bottle to another glass and made it so. “Better times,” he said, clicking.

“Same ter you, sir, I’m sure, sir.” And by Josh that was worth being kept out of bed for. Went down something wonderful. Good old aigenaig. And then, out of the corners of the shrewdest eyes, he began to study the man whose every mood he knew, anxiously wondering how things had gone with that there little bit of selfish stuff wot ought ter be shook. He saw, and was surprised to see, a very happy look in the eyes of the Crusoe to whom he was Man Friday in this new country, a look which seemed to convey a huge relief with a new spark of light burning behind it.

“Um,” he thought, with the sense of drama and fondness for horrors that goes with all the ‘Arrises, “praps ’es choked the cat,” though, of course, the word he used belongs to the wife of a rival family of domestic pets. But he knew better than to ask. This man was not only his benefactor but his friend. He liked now to be treated on terms of strict equality. All the old stuff, proper to the Service, was a wash-out, — not that ‘Arry could ever remember it for more than a minute every other day. But there was, he knew instinctively, one door that he must never venture to open, in or out of his cups. Mrs. Beamish. On that was written the word that he had seen most frequently wherever the good old Boche had been, and on which he seemed to thrive, — “Verboten.” He had, of course, taken the telephone message and so he knew about the meeting. He had also played Peeping

Tom through the waiters' door in the Restaurant for Summer Husbands and enjoyed his first look at the wife who had never written and to whom his Major had never returned when on leave, at least not for five years. He was greatly surprised. In fact you could have knocked him down with a feather. He had expected to see a handsome, rather aggressive woman, tall, a little heavy, who sat high and had a way of looking down at people as though they were, as he put it, "Saturday night washers." Instead of which, "My Gum," said he, "a pussy purr-purr, come and stroke me. A bloomin' kitten," and it was odd that he got instinctively the nick-name by which all the Rutland Gate boys had known her. He had seen great friendliness between them at their little table on the edge of the hugging square, but he knew deep down in his boots that the Major was not going to be taken back. He knew from what he had been able to glean that the wife had more money than the Major and that fact alone put a reunion out of the question. He took it for granted that Mrs. Beamish had come to America, as they had, in order to better herself, there being precious few decent men with money in England, and it seemed to him that a little woman who was pretty enough to take *his* breath away wouldn't have much trouble in catching a young American with well-lined pockets. Then the Major would give her a divorce and be free. And if, in the meantime, he struck oil and married again it was a certainty that 'Arry 'Arris would be engaged as chauffeur and so continue to serve the man whom he loved better than a brother.

On the question of striking oil, and getting oily, he possessed an idea that he put forth as he picked up and straightened out the clothes that Beamish began to take

off on his way to bed. He said, "I got into a bit of a chinwag with a cove round at the Y. an hour or two ago, sir. If 'e was on the level, and 'e looked it, 'e's got something that may give us a start."

"Oh," said Beamish eagerly. "What's that? It'll have to be something that any child can do. They've only made soldiers of us, remember."

"Well, 'e's wot they call 'ere a drummer, which is a commercial traveller in our talk, and was doin' so well that 'e bought isselt a Ford limousine to run round with 'is goods. Not bein' a business man I couldn't foller 'is reasons for the slump that knocked the stuffin' out of 'im, but the result is that the car, as good as new, is on the market, at a knock down price."

"I don't see how that affects us, old man."

"Well, 'ercourse I may be dippy but it come to me in a blindin' flash that if we, — I mean you, bought that Jimmy o' Ford and got a taxi license I could wangle it about the roads and make it pay for its beans and a bit over."

"By Jove!" said Beamish, standing up in his shorts.

"Like the idea, sir? We could paint it yeller, which seems to be the fashnable tint just now, and while you look about for the great job, a partnership in Morgans or the like, I could pick up enough with a bright smile and a gleamin' taxi to settle the weekly bill at the Y."

Beamish gave a whoop and a rather pathetic excitement seized him. "The only thing I know how to do," he said, "havin' been lifted out of Oxford at the end of my first year, is to drive a car. And you're a pro. By working in a series of reliefs, we could, between us, keep that machine tickin' sixteen hours out

of the twenty-four and perhaps achieve a few regular customers with what you call a bright smile. It's a brain wave, old man, that's what it is. And if nobody pushes us off the streets we may be able by close attention to business to earn enough to buy another Ford and double the takings. It's the way to get the air that we're used to — I can't see either of us sittin' on an office stool even if we got the chance, — and there's bread and cheese and bed in it anyhow."

"I think so," said 'Arry, as pleased as Punch to have unearthed a practical scheme.

"All right then, we'll go round in the morning, get your friend to let us inspect the Ford, and if it is as good as new take a risk and buy it, first of all finding out if we can get a license and how. Here's to the possible foundation of the great taxi monopoly of V. Beamish and 'Arry 'Arris. I knew there wasn't a new moon to-night for nothin'." And he sent out a laugh that must have awakened the pigeons on the roof of the Grand Central. And once more Don Quixote and his Sancho Panza clicked and drank.

"Don't know nuthink about a new moon," said 'Arry, drawing the back of his hand across his mouth, stirred deeply at the alluring prospect suggested by his optimistic partner, "but a bloomin' spider let issself down from the ceiling just before you come in and looked me straight in the face, and if that ain't a good sign I don't know wot is."

It was an hour before these two gallant veterans, whose war services meant nothing more to a grateful Government than forgetfulness, went to bed that night. With the one unpurchased brick which might to-morrow turn out to be made of straw they built a Castle in Spain. And in a beautiful suite of

rooms facing south, Beamish placed the Bluebird. 'Arry 'Arris was mostly concerned about the garage.

Little they dreamed, these two, that the winding line of life would eventually lead them into an imbroglio brought about by the imp on the shoulder of a girl of whom they had never heard.

IV

AT precisely the same hour that night two other men whose friendship was just as good were sitting up together. Though for a very different reason.

There had been a long and painful silence during which Pelham had sprung to his feet and gone for one of his characteristic walks between the solid furniture of his man-sized den. Malcolm, busy formulating further excuses for Beatrix, in which he was becoming an expert, watched him through a fog of smoke. And it seemed to him, in that midnight hour, that he was not the only watcher of his friend's inarticulate distress. With an imagination that was open to every impression, he told himself that the glassy stare of all the heads that marked the bachelor years of poor old Pelham had become less fixed from sympathy, and were also following the man who didn't understand women and who knew, unfortunately, very much less about girls, up and down and all round the maze of furniture and bewilderment.

The ugly truth was that Beatrix had not returned to dinner, and was still out on the road with that rotter Greenwood. It was utterly incomprehensible. More.

It was most cruel, most unwise, and incalculably dangerous. This was the great day, remember, to which Pelham had been looking forward with the excitement of a lover. All of it, hitherto, had been absorbed by other people and almost from the moment that Beatrix had made her carefully dramatic return to life most of it had been spoiled for him by an up-raised hand and the barrier of a grudge that had made him wonder whether the earth had performed a somersault. No one knew as well as Malcolm did that Pelham was a sound and simple man, without conceit, greatly and wonderfully in love, straining every nerve to be patient under strong provocation and disappointment, doing his level best to be gentle and forbearing with the girl whom he had put through, as he thought of it, with the exaggeration of a highly sensitive nature, a crisis which, but for the grace of God and her own courage, she might never have come through. But, for all that, he had not been turned loose on the world without the ordinary amount of vanity that marks the one difference between a human being and an angel — so far as we can guess. And this, together with the pride that is connected with it by a short-distance artery, had been hurt, awfully and terribly hurt. And that was bad. That, as everybody knows, was the springboard from which men dived into shallow water and broke their necks. Or, if they had the luck to dive flat — came out with so strong a smarting of humiliation, probably to the laughter of the crowd, that they took it out of themselves by diving again in the same dangerous place, with the deliberate intention of giving gruesome work to a reluctant coroner. Or, getting out of similes, which is always wise, put them into the temporary insane frame of mind that leads to

a break in the delicate thread of marriage. "I hate to say it," thought Malcolm, "but she's a fool and is asking for trouble. Greenwood too. That utter waster, of whom Pelham is jealous because he has youth on his side."

"I've a damned good mind," said Pelham, coming to a halt, "to have my own car out and drive up to Town. Two people can play this game, y'know. It's easy enough. And if she cares more about Greenwood than she does about me, let her have Greenwood. That's all I've got to say."

But it wasn't by a long chalk. He had changed his dinner jacket for a bathing suit and was on the diving board. He was going to break his neck as sure as fate.

"That's rot," said Malcolm, "and you know it."

"Do I? I'm thirty-five and he's in the early twenties. They'd make a fine couple. Youth to youth, and all that sort of thing. You know these cursed truisms better than I do. You probably wrote that one yourself. I've got my bachelor rooms still, because there's no place here for all the old stuff. I can make myself perfectly happy in them until I hit on a plan for a little enjoyment, for a change. Look at that round faced clock, if you've got any eyes left in your head. Can't you see that she's been gone since half past five and that it's now ten minutes past twelve? By God, it's . . . it's . . ."

And under his violent kick the leg of the table quivered with pain. And so did his foot. It always does, especially when the leg of the table helps to support an antique.

But beneath all this anger there was an acute anxiety. Not under the most diabolical of medieval

tortures would he have confessed to this, even to Malcolm, but with every minute that added cold-bloodedly to the hours of Beatrix's delayed appearance the poor devil saw new pictures of accidents. Greenwood, that reckless conceited ass, had taken a dangerous corner on two wheels at eighty miles an hour, dashed into a telegraph pole and thrown Beatrix head first into a pile of stones. He didn't give a tinker's dam for the fact that smart Alec was as dead as a squashed frog, but when a far too vivid imagination led him to the place where that lovely thing lay, all crumpled. . . . Or, going blindly down a cul-de-sac, because he was, of course, one of those men who never took the trouble to know the road, Greenwood had telescoped his idiotic car against a wall, and Beatrix, unable to save herself . . .

Outwardly as phlegmatic as an Englishman, and as cool as a fish in any trouble that concerned himself physically, Pelham was one of those people so sensitively strung that he attended funerals the day before they took place, entered operating rooms at the sight of a doctor who had come to give a simple prescription to anyone of whom he was deeply fond, and felt the surgeon's saw at work on his own leg at the news of an accident to that of any man to whom he was devoted. For two hours, therefore, it followed that he had seen Beatrix killed in every one of the conceivable ways that his imagination could invent, and had been wifeless a hundred times in that agonising period of time. It is asking almost too much of such a man to love as he loved.

And it was because Malcolm knew all this, as he knew every one of the workings of Pelham's mind, that he sat tight under the abuse and sarcasm, held his

peace and accepted the blame, humbly and with contrition, as a good friend must. But what he willed with all the concentration of one who sits in front of a sheet of paper on which, with any luck, a verse will grow, was that when Beatrix eventually became ashamed of her fooling and walked into the room with the moonlight in her hair, Pelham would open the floodgates of his wrath upon her and make her pay up to the last cent for that unnecessary and unforgivable escapade.

If, getting out of the shell of his reserve, he had had the wisdom to advise his friend to adopt this course, and had coached him in the sort of thing that he should say, the imp would have dropped from Beatrix's shoulder, the day would even then have become great, although it had taken its place among the yesterdays, and the spirits of all the men who had made friendship good would have erected a monument to his everlasting fame. If,—the little word that might have changed the current of history and written the story of many failures in very different words.

All the windows were open, so that the first aggressive sound of Greenwood's advertising car might be heard. It was one of those rare nights that only come in May, breathless and magical, when the young summer, like a lovely girl, sleeps in beauty. The scent of flowers hung upon the air. The silence was not broken even by the murmuring of leaves. Not a cloud drifted across the bewildering pattern of stars. The bosom of the earth rose and fell in deep, regular breathing.

And when Pelham spoke again it was to say, "Go to bed, old man. Why should you wait up? If I could sleep tonight I should turn in. Beatrix isn't interested

in me. I hate to see you sitting there, getting cursed and having a rotten time, for which I'm frightfully sorry. You can't do anything more than you've done already, except thank God that you're a bachelor. I only wish that I could do the same."

But he didn't. It was a feeble thing in lies. What he did wish was that the whole of the day might have been spent with Beatrix on the *Galatea*, with a great space of water between the family and Greenwood and that grudge which was so difficult to understand. In his amazing simplicity he believed that this would have made things different.

But even on the *Galatea* far out to sea or in an aeroplane high above the house of Vanderdyke and the Greenwood's yelling car, Beatrix would have had her mood with her, that untranslatable yearning for what goes by the name of Romance to those who are passing through the intermediate stage between adolescence and womanhood, — brief, tragic, wonderful, made up of glamor and passion and infrequently realized dreams which can be suffered or enjoyed by those who have not crossed the Rubicon, even although they have had a baby, and, therefore, by all the canons of unimaginative conventions should have outgrown the queerness of virgin youth.

The hard fact remained that whether at sea, in the air, or under his own roof, it was for Pelham and only Pelham to find the one medicine that could effect the cure, — because this was a sort of illness, the first change of life, — and thus enable Beatrix to become normal, and responsible and sober, as she was really most anxious to do. Very intricate and very simple, — but it was one of the effects of nature that made so intimate a relationship between a man and a woman

as marriage a touch and go business, balanced on the tip of a feather.

Needless to say, Malcolm did not go to bed. He too, like 'Arry 'Arris, was numbered among the Sancho Panzas. He, too, had stood in a hideous flash of imagination on the lip of an open grave.

He went over to the window and looked out at that beautiful but callous scene. "Oh, my God," he said, "where's Beatrix?"

V

LESS than a quarter of a mile from Pelham's house was a hill at the foot of which lay a wide panorama of open country, and on the top of this, with the moonlight in her hair, seated in the much-abused Greenwood's abominable car, there, if you please, was Beatrix. And there, to the joy of an overworked engine, on that precise spot, she had been since half past nine.

The eager Greenwood to whom, after a brief burst of public cordiality, she had been a thousand miles away, had frequently asked himself why. The astonished car, which, once out of its garage, was used to being worked into a lather, had echoed the question, and Beatrix herself, standing outside of her mood, had more than once demanded of what she liked to call her imp what in the name of all that was inexcusable he was forcing her to do. "You're a fool, you're a fool," she told herself with contempt. "You're playing a bad and foolish game, of the silly rules of

which you ought to be thankful to say Pelham is entirely ignorant. If he weren't he wouldn't be Pel. He would be a man who must have come to you secondhand. He doesn't understand and he never will understand. You're putting him through a form of torture for which you ought to be spanked. You're trying to do one of those queer things that can't ever be achieved. It's a forlorn hope. It failed the very moment that it came into your head. Don't hang on to this girl thing. Drop it, let it go, and be a woman."

But it was all very well to talk like that. The idea had become fixed. She had been thinking about it and building it up from the moment that she had told Pelham to go and tried to make him stay. It had grown and grown through all the days and nights of her subjection to the baby, through every hour of her convalescence, to the time when she made her self-consciously dramatic return to the ordinary routine of life that day. It had mastered her. She had become the slave to a mood. It was hopeless to endeavor to unfasten her shackles.

And so there she was, on top of the hill, almost within shouting distance of the house behind the trees, playing the girl game for the very last time, perhaps to the bitter end.

A most peculiar evening. Very pleased with himself and the sudden turn of events, thrilled, as far as he could still manage to be thrilled, at being taken up by Beatrix again, and prepared to perform all his well-practised tricks of charm and sympathy to make this the first step to a delicious intrigue, the ever-green Greenwood had started off well. After the initial, "How Wonderful to see you again, how Gorgeous you

look," and the sort of thing of which this type of dancing hound is past-master, saying, even then, a hundred per cent less than he conveyed by his roving and caressing eyes, Greenwood had let his car go in order to achieve two generally irresistible results. The first to win the admiration of his companion for his skill as a driver. The second to send so powerful a current of air through her brain that all its cobwebs would be blown away and a sense of reckless exhilaration put in their place. It was usually a very successful scheme. He had known the primmest girl to lose her balance as well as a good deal of her caution by what he called the air-cure. And then, continuing the treatment, he had slowed down to a humdrum forty-five and had gone on with his How Splendid this and How Delightful the other, and will you swear you're quite comfortable, and that you're glad you came, until he considered that the moment had come for a little dinner in a quiet place where wine was to be had. And up to that point he had flattered himself that the cure was going well. The inoculation seemed to be taking. Beatrix had returned his smiles, had murmured satisfactory replies to his boyish Greenwoodisms, and had laughed under the refreshment of high speed.

But the fine edge of this youth's fastidiousness had been worn down long ago by his indiscriminations, especially since the Armistice, and his suggestion as to dinner in a gaudy looking Road House with its advertising boards and tortured wood, its blazing beds of pink geraniums and whitened stones, was his first mistake. He thought in terms of chorus girls. The "Oh, thanks, no," was kind but firm, and although it made him kick himself for a first-class fool, the

"I think we'll wait for supper when we get back late," had warmed him back to confidence and supper — late. Vast possibilities were opened up by those two words. They were to be alone for hours then, and when the peeping eye of day had closed . . .

No. Nothing doing. Had he lost his touch, or what? Or had he fallen down to a reasonable speed before the cure had been effected? Until the stars came and the shadows melted away he had continued in his well-worked formula. More speed, a pause for flowery boyishness and then speed once more. Finally the brief order to take the car to the top of the hill, anchor there and watch the panorama pass from its daytime look with open fields and patches of woods, villages tucked away among the ups and downs, the high thin steeples, to its night appearance with lights gleaming here and there away below, like stars reflected in dark pools — and silence.

And then had come, at last, with everything to help, the sad story of a broken heart, the "oh, my Gods", the "If only you had nots", the "I might have been a better man" and such like. Wonderfully well done and not without a certain amount of genuine sincerity. The boy had really crashed at this girl's feet. . . . But he might just as well have been speaking to a spirit as to Beatrix. For there she sat with her chin in her hands, her fair hair gleaming in the pale light, looking through the dark veil into — what? To-morrow? If not to-morrow, certainly not into a day in which he, Greenwood, mattered as much as a village boy with milk, or an old man begging for a crust. Pathos with a flick of passion, ruined hope with a plea for reconstruction, everything, every one of those well-turned phrases, some of which he had never used before,

fluttered to the ground and burst like unhit clay pigeons. Hell, what was the idea? Why had he been brought out, kept out, hour after useless hour, done out of an admirable dinner, good wine and an excellent cigar, a talk with Franklin who was, even as a husband, a well-known sportsman, and general comfort?

Why . . . why?

And why, after never a word of thanks or praise or pity, was the order given suddenly to "Drive home, quick, — quick, I tell you. I want to get home", as though from a puritanical girl who expected to be locked out by irate parents.

Greenwood gave it up, but, with thoughts of supper, he sent the car down that hill and round that corner and all along the straight into Franklin drive as though it were possessed by the devil. And because that habitually unsurprised young man had evidently not been sufficiently astonished that night Franklin came forward as the car drew up and having handed out his wife with frozen politeness beckoned to the footman who lurked in the lighted hall.

"Oh, Greenwood," he said, "so that you may not be kept up very much later by packing your things here they are, all ready. Put them in, Jackson, will you? The clubs will go in front as well. That's right. You'll have the roads to yourself all the way home. Goodbye."

And then, taking the breathless Beatrix by the arm and leading her forcibly in he slammed the thick front door.

VI

BREATHLESS? Of course she was breathless. That iron hand upon her arm, even more than the faultless way in which he had packed young Greenwood about his business, might be the desired answer to her game of stand-off please-come-on. After all, then, that horrid drive and that deliberate waiting might have had the planned effect of turning Pelham into the King of Beasts. His beginning was good, was exactly right, was stirring. The axe, the shoutings, the seizing and flinging, the brief return to the primeval, — oh, Pelham, go on, go on. The bridge would be crossed by the morning, the intermediate stage left behind for ever, the flag of peace run up to fly above the house. It's all so simple, darling, even if it's all so silly. It's only girl. For the last time give me Romance, in capital letters, and I'll be good, I swear.

He swung her away from him roughly and his eyes were black with anger. Who could have failed to hear that rattle-banging car as it came along the road hell for leather and arrived by a miracle at the house? "What the devil have you been up to?" he said. "Of all days, to-day."

By Jove, he was going on, pricelessly, to perfection. And she smoothed her sleeves and threw her hat at a chair and turned a cool, supercilious chin. "Up to? I don't quite know what you mean?"

"Then if you don't you're not worth loving, you're

not worth going through tortures for, you're not worth living with."

Malcolm, standing on the threshold of the smoke filled den willed him on. "Go for her, go for her," he shouted in his throat, "hurt her, humiliate her, make her pay, so that she will never play the fool again."

And Beatrix, the outward contradiction to her thoughts, echoed those words, that urging, the prayer, stood chin-tilted, eyes laughing, don't-care-two-cents round her mouth, moon cool, amused though slightly annoyed, the world her property, this man merely an irrational and kill-joy husband.

"Have it your own way," she said. "I think I'll have some supper."

But he stopped her as she hoped he would and stood aghast. And that was bad.

"Oh, God," thought Malcolm, "He's going weak!"

"You mean that, — after everything that we've been through?"

What could she do with this sensitive man who had faced machine guns with a to-hell-with-you grin and fell to pieces at unkindness from her? Never so much as at that moment had she longed to throw her arms round his neck and cry, "I love you, I love you, I adore you," and kiss him till he swam.

She shrugged her shoulders. "I always say what I mean," she said.

And there followed the fatal pause, the clatter of fallen weapons, the hurt that spurted blood.

"Go on, go on," cried Malcolm, willing the veins in seams on his temples.

"Oh, my dear," thought Beatrix, "if you only knew something of women and one little thing about girls."

"Then that settles it," said Pelham. "A great day, this!" and he turned and left the hall.

And Beatrix, herself aghast for a change, ran to the door that he had shut behind him, to listen, with her heart in her mouth.

And out came Malcolm, the friend and the man who loved to the end of loving.

"It's broken," he said. "Oh, damn, it's broken."

"What's broken?"

"The thread, the delicate thread that holds a marriage together. Oh, Beatrix, you fool."

And she whirled round at the poet in goggles, the butt of a friend, and hammered his chest with her fist. "You don't understand. You don't understand, either of you. It was a game, the last of my games, — the death of my youth, the crossing of the bridge."

"Sssh," he said.

And at the sound of a car that rounded the house and passed the house and went as fast down the drive as Greenwood's, she went as white as a ghost, as white as a dove, as white as death.

PART VI

I

A WIFE may play many tricks upon a man and hold his love. She may run riot through his money, edge his friends away until he stands at her side alone, transplant him from his old ground, change the current of his thoughts and blast the roots of his principles. She may, so that she is kind and exercises with generosity the allure of her sex, remake his character, alter his interests, and lead him down strange paths without a struggle, as the stories of so many lives have proved. But let her hurt his pride and sense of fairness by manufacturing an excuse to withhold herself from him, and, however deep in love he may be, the foundations of marriage give way and the whole thing comes down with a crash.

There is no human relationship that is put to so many tests as that which exists between a man and a woman who live together, whether it has been entered into with the greatest caution after a long engagement during which both parties have tried honestly to disclose themselves, or rushed into impetuously on nothing more than a slight acquaintance. The thing called love, which overwhelms the common sense of the most experienced men and women, as well as of the young and hot-blooded so that they bind themselves with a legal knot before they have discovered whether they are composed of the innumerable char-

acteristics that are going to make them like each other after the first ecstasies are over, has many interpretations. It is used mostly with indiscrimination and carelessness when the real word is passion. When a marriage is based solely on that, the end is in sight before the unhappy couple has left the altar steps. It is much less frequently used in its definite dictionary sense as a compound affection consisting of esteem, benevolence and animal desire, and when that definition can be applied truly to the married relationship there is every hope of its success. But, even then, only if esteem and benevolence long outlive animal desire and the words to like and to respect are there to be linked tight to those of to love. And it must be remembered that there are several distinctions between to like and to respect which add to the infinite difficulties. It is possible for a man to love a woman for whom he has great respect and dislike her very much. The animal desire that rushed him into marriage may live for years and keep him from desertion and infidelity, while, at the same time, certain of his wife's mannerisms, habits or methods may make her the most unlikable creature on earth to him. She may, although a good and estimable woman, have an atrocious accent and a way of repeating the current catch phrase on all occasions so that his ear is jarred beyond endurance. She may go in for grotesque clothes, — poor dear imitative soul, — such as are to be seen in the windows of all fashionable dressmakers, wear nodding plumes in her hats like those that used to be sported by funeral horses, or do her hair in a way that makes him uneasy and self-conscious in public places. She may be one of those humorless women who play baby with other men, or one who, with the grim determination to

appear intellectual, browses on the books of the little clever people and echoes their faddism at every opportunity. She may have adopted too loud and frequent a laugh, or think it amusing to pull down the fourth wall of her house and indulge in bedroom stories about her husband from the opposite end of the dinner table. She may be possessed of the incurable habit of conducting insane badinage all through a game of bridge, or become a victim to the most tragic of all domestic vices and sing. Indeed, the ways in which she may get most horribly and most frequently on the nerves of the man who marries her for the third ingredient of the dictionary's compound are many and various, and even when they appear to be most trifling to the looker-on can very quickly become so offensive to his sense of fastidiousness as to make marriage a painful and calamitous business. It is equally possible for a woman to marry a man whom she desires out of all reason and eventually to find herself utterly unable to bear his constant association because of certain of his manners. He may, for instance, insist upon smoking a pipe in her bedroom, or clipping his moustache over her dressing-table so that her powder box is filled with short, sharp hairs. He may form the habit of interfering with the servants or become a golf fiend and desert her over every week-end. He may have no ear for music and persist in whistling the popular airs all over the apartment in a way that encourages a constant desire to 'scream, or he may bring carelessness to a fine art and put his corn plasters on her tooth-brush, which is enough to make the most long-suffering woman pack her things and go back to her mother.

Then, too, it is possible for a man to like and respect

a woman very much indeed and never be moved to love, and for a woman to love a man and never be stirred to passion. And, again, if two people marry and it turns out by accident that they are endowed with precisely the same characteristics they are likely to bore each other to extinction before many years have passed, and long, with human contradiction, for disagreement; whereas if they marry and quickly discover that they disagree on almost every point of discussion there can hardly ever be even the regulation breathing space between their constant bouts of fighting. Marriage under any of these conditions is a very trying and difficult relationship and must develop either into a state of armed neutrality or open and declared hostility. It is very rarely conducted with a mutual tolerance that ensures a certain amount of peace and mild happiness. In fact, except for the rare and beautiful instances that every one of us knows, admires and envies, is not marriage, as Emerson asked, "An open question when it is alleged, from the beginning of the world, that such as are in the institution wish to get out, and such as are out wish to get in?"

II

WHAT of Franklin and *his* marriage, which had stood so good a chance of being numbered among the rare and beautiful instances, and for the continued success of which that little band of interested people hoped and prayed, the Vanderdyke father and mother,

Aunt Honoria, the little brown woman, Elizabeth McKenzie, the poet in goggles, and the Wonder himself, who probably did more thinking between sleeps than even his admirers imagined was possible?

Well, the thin thread had been broken. There was no doubt about that. Beatrix, not quite sane because she was suffering from the change of life that takes place at the end of girlhood, had set out to hurt her man a little in payment of the grudge that had grown and grown in a queer contradictory corner of her mind while she was waiting for her baby, and had succeeded in hurting him so much that he had walked out and left her. He had said to himself, "All right, it's over. I'm turned down, kept off, refused. There's no justice in it. Not a cent's worth of excuse for it. I've done nothing that I wasn't told to do and that with the greatest reluctance. At the end of my waiting, after pain and terror and thankfulness, up goes a stone wall. All right, it's over, because I'm not climbing. I can take nothing that isn't given. I'm not a thief and I'm not a bully. Either I'm wanted or I'm not. And if I'm not, I'm out. Well, I'm out, and that's the end."

And from the moment when he drove his car out of the garage and headed for his bachelor rooms in New York to the ghastly moment when he put his latchkey into the door of a place which, a little over an hour before, had belonged to a time that had been folded up and put completely away by marriage, a time filled with good memories but lived and done with, he was going from the end to what? "God knows," he said over and over again. "I don't." All he knew was that he was out. All he could say was that it was over. He was not a thief and he was

not a bully. She had put up a stone wall and he wasn't climbing. That was the end.

And as he drove along those deserted moonlit roads back to a dead past, by way of several detours that merely lengthened his tragic journey by a mile or two, anger, humiliation, and over and above these, a deeply wounded pride went every inch of the way with him. A wonderful ending to the great day — ye Gods! A lonely policeman smoking a pipe; a man in too-tight trousers fixing a new tire to a car on the edge of a ditch; villages with a belated light here and there among the small houses packed as close together as sardines in a tin; a mechanical piano in an unhappy road house; the High Streets of small towns almost asleep but for a lurking figure or two, — and then the long dreary entrance into the great octopus city through the colored quarter, the Jewish quarter, past rattling trolley-cars, wild taxicabs, automobiles and dust.

Dust that was so thick on the curtainless windows of those long-deserted rooms that the stars above the golden cock crowing on top of the fantastic building that strained its neck to touch the sky were as dull as though seen through a veil. Dust that made a carpet on the carpetless floors so that every foot-mark left an impression as on smoke-grimed sand. Dust that dulled the once virginal whiteness of the cloths bound round the heads of elk, wapiti, caribou and red-deer which made them look as though they were suffering from an epidemic of mumps, and toned down the red brown of still odorous tar paper strung to all the chairs. Dust that furred the tops of books and sideboards and pictures and gave the baths the appearance of being relics of Atlantis. Everywhere dust, so that

this place seemed to represent to this man the sepulcher not only of bachelorhood but of married life, the ruins of his love, his joy, his passion, which were blended in dust together where human folly slept.

He had not stopped to think that it would be as impossible to live in these rooms in their present condition as among the débris of an old landmark that was in the unsympathetic hands of wreckers. Also he had come away without having pitched anything into a bag. And so there he was, homeless, a tree torn up by the roots. There he was, with all his money; with that charming old house which he had just, in a sort of way, kicked over, with a yacht as big as a young liner lying in the river, and with this horribly expensive apartment in a state of chaos, without a pillow upon which to rest a tired and angry head. It was enough to make a cat laugh. It was perfectly true that the Plaza was only fifty strides away and that there were dozens of other hotels within five minutes' walk. But was he going to present himself to any of their gaping clerks in the wee small hours without a bag of any sort and ask for a room? He would be shot first. "Damn everything," he said to the echoing walls. "I'm no better than a poor devil of a hobo. I'm utterly down and out and all I can do is to walk the streets or go round to the garage and camp in the car." And this, with precious little appreciation of the perverted humor of the thing, he started out to do, banging the door of his dust-covered apartment and taking with him into the now almost deserted Avenue a feeling of ultimity that made every step the one that would bring him to the edge of everything. And the brief quietude that lay over the noisiest city on earth did a good deal to encourage that queer sen-

sation. There was something unreal, almost mystic, in the fact that the blood had ceased to flow in that congested mass of arteries, and that its huge body, worn and nervous and exhausted, lay stretched out in momentary peace, like Gulliver over whose pegged-down limbs uncountable Lilliputians had ceased to swarm, yelling and struggling and getting into each other's way. Uncanny, unbelievable.

And when, presently, he walked into the vault-like place that reeked of gasoline and motor oil, went past the night man who had gone to sleep on a broken-backed chair with his close-cropped head against the wall, found his way to the car which had carried him out of marriage into the loose end of nothing, the rows of static machines whose job in life it was to move added again to the peculiar unreality into which he had fallen. The light was not too dim to prevent him seeing the "No Smoking" notices that hung conspicuously on the walls, and so, without the comfort and companionship of a pipe, he got into his car and sat there with his legs stretched out, his hand in his pockets and his eyes on failure.

And that is what a girl can do for a man — any girl for almost any man, especially the one who doesn't understand the unexplained and often unexplainable phases through which she passes, — the excitement of the mind that catches her at a moment when she is not quite normal; the emotion, breaking out like an illness, that is directed to the attainment of a sensation from which pleasure, sensual, intellectual or spiritual, is expected; the passion excited by the love of love, or uneasiness at the want of it; the aspiration, the craving, the prayer. That's what a wife can do for a too-sensitive, blundering man, who is unversed in the

strange, childlike subtleties of women; who believes only in what he sees and is told, has pride, and an honest simple manner of looking at things, that renders him utterly unable to find his way among the mazes of contradiction that constitutes the feminine mind and makes marriage a touch and go business, a delicate thread that can be broken by a word, a sneer, or a rash experiment much more easily than by an act of disloyalty or an open fight.

Poor old Pel! He saw himself too old for this girl, which hit him hard; but beyond and above that he saw himself as distasteful to her. She had told him so, after he had waited so long, and that had put him out. That was the end. He wasn't a thief and he wasn't a bully. And so it was over, because he was not the man to climb that sort of wall. The imp, invented by Beatrix as an excuse for her last and most reckless indulgence in girl-stuff, as she insisted upon calling it, and it was a most annoying phrase, had left her a grass-widow with a fatherless boy, and broken up a marriage that had had every chance of becoming a little garden in a wilderness. It was a damned shame.

III

It was at a moment the following day when Pelham was getting very badly in the way of the small army of cleaners and arrangers who had taken possession of his apartment that Malcolm walked in.

All the way up in the train that was filled with commuters reluctant to exchange the fresh beauty of the

country for the hot pavements and bad smells of the city, Malcolm, very worried and anxious, had been working out a plan of attack. He was bound to think of it as an attack because, knowing Peiham through and through, he was certain that he would find a man whose anger and humiliation and wounded pride had built round him a Gibraltar of impregnability.

He had not seen Beatrix that morning. She was not to be seen. In reply to his request for an interview Brownie had been sent down to say that Beatrix had not slept very well and was going to remain in bed until lunch. And, as may be imagined, there had been a volley of questions and answers between these two which had led nowhere and achieved nothing except, of course, to confirm the uneasy suspicion in the mind of the little brown woman that things were worse than they appeared to be. Like all those who have suffered so consistently from the great unkindness of life that their rescue by a loyal and benevolent friend seems to be too good to be true, poor dear Mrs. Lester Keene expected to see Fate stalk out of the shadows at any moment. She was utterly devoid of confidence and as pessimistic as a newspaper man. Going quietly into the sunny morning room in which Malcolm was waiting gravely she, in a crinkling black dress that looked home-made, delivered her message, and returning from the door which she had forgotten to close, had started off on her own account — rudely, because she was frightened.

“What’s the matter?”

“Nothing.”

“Nonsense. You can’t put me off like that. Where’s Mr. Franklin?”

“Gone to town on business, I think.”

"No, you don't. He *has* no business. And even if he had it wouldn't be important enough to take him away in the middle of the night."

"You may be right, Mrs. Keene. I don't know anything about it."

"Why don't you? You're his friend."

"I simply don't."

"You're not telling me the truth. You know there's something the matter. You know why Beatrix has had a bad night, when she never has a bad night and you wanted to see her now to plan something. You can't deceive me."

"I don't want to deceive you."

"You and Beatrix are both deceiving me. It's a conspiracy."

To which Malcolm had been inclined to ask what the dickens she had to do with it and why on earth he and Beatrix and Pelham, or, for the matter of that, any other combination of persons, should indulge in anything so gratuitously stupid as to conspire against her. But he was too kind and too sympathetic to do more than deny the impeachment and assure her that everything was all right, "perfectly all right."

"I know better. If everything had been perfectly all right Mr. Franklin wouldn't have left the house during the night that he had been waiting for all this time for anything on earth. That's certain." And having blurted out that quite unanswerable and, as it immediately struck her, much too daring remark for a woman of her consummate respectability, she had been overcome by self-consciousness and had retired chastely and with haste. Under different circumstances it would have been a most amusing exit.

And so, inspired with the hope that he might be

able to achieve something that would bring his friends together again, Malcolm went off without a word to anyone. His job, he told himself, hoping that Beatrix had been merely playing the fool, was to get at Pel before all the rocks that he must already have surrounded himself with had settled firmly into place. The opening remark which had cost him an infinity of thought was far from fortunate.

Stepping over the brawny Irish woman who was scrubbing the threshold of the once familiar apartment, he made for the sitting-room where Pel was standing on an oasis of dust in the midst of the cleaning fluid that was being used upon the floor by two other hefty ladies, who wanted nothing so much as his absence. He met his friend's expected glare with courage, and without any preliminary beating about the bush, spoke his carefully prepared line.

"I want you to know at once, old man," he said, "that I have not been sent to see you."

And that was so idiotic, so damned idiotic, that even the man who didn't believe that he would ever be able to laugh again burst out laughing — which plunged the very kind but most successful blunderer into a perspiration of bewilderment. On the one hand, Beatrix, having deliberately worked up this desperate situation in order to indulge in a temperamental spree, had collapsed at the result. On the other, Pelham, who had gone to pieces in the face of Beatrix's "Verboten" was already capable of giving a frightfully sound imitation of a laughing jackass. What the devil?

"Sent to see me," said Pel, as soon as he could, still maintaining his position on the rapidly dwindling oasis. "That's immense! Who should have sent you —

Brownie? Young Greenwood?" And he went off into another painful guffaw.

Malcolm's collar became hot. He had feelings, little as it seemed to be recognized. It appeared to be generally supposed that his *métier* in life was to play the thankless part of peacemaker and enjoy the rôle, to be ignored by Beatrix and treated as a moron by Pelham. "If you want to know what I'm here for," he replied shortly, "on a day when the city's a loathesome hole, get off that square of dust and come outside." And he disappeared from the open door; stepped over the corsetless Irish form and went out into the small be-marbled space facing the elevator shaft.

To which, after a pause sufficiently long to prove that he was entirely without curiosity Pelham followed him, and the well-expressed relief of the two scrubbers broke forth in the ripest Irish. To a working woman the presence of an unoccupied man about a house in the daytime is an outrage.

The two friends looked each other over, and when Malcolm saw the tired eyes and creased clothes of his friend a great sympathy took the place of righteous indignation and revived his intention to move heaven and earth to bring about a reconciliation. He was, he confessed to himself, much as he loved Beatrix, on the side of Pelham in this unfortunate split, which made his job all the more difficult.

But he didn't say so. He went off at a rather brainy tangent, to convey the impression that he had decided to mind his own business and butt in to the marriage question no further. "I'm going to cut my holiday short and get back to Paris," he said casually.

“Good idea,” said Pelham. “Wait a few weeks and I’ll go with you.”

That was exactly what he didn’t want. He had come to take Pelham home, not to put three thousand miles of unruly water between his two best friends. “But why a few weeks?” he asked, to mark time.

“I must make this place fit to live in and see my lawyers. Then I shall be free.”

The elevator stopped and the robot who worked it raised his eyebrows slightly.

“No thanks,” said Pelham, “unless you’re going down, Malcolm.”

“No, I’m not.”

The usual clatter of the cage and the sharp click of the door and the thing slid away. But the word “free” echoed from wall to wall of that small space like the discharge of a gun. It staggered Malcolm out of his badly assumed indifference and brought him back immediately to the root of this uncomfortable call. “Do you mean to suggest that you’re going to take this to your lawyers without giving it another chance?” he said, breathlessly.

“Wouldn’t you?” asked Pelham, with a sort of icy bitterness.

“No, I certainly shouldn’t. Good God, you can’t bring everything down with a clatter, like a bull in a china shop.”

“Can’t I? Why not? It’s perfectly simple.”

“But — but isn’t there anything to be done to put your marriage back on at least some semblance of its old footing?”

“No, nothing,” said Pelham.

Malcolm gasped. “But I don’t see — upon my soul,

I don't see what's happened to — to take you to these lengths."

Pelham emerged from behind his barbed wire fence and put his arm round Malcolm's shoulder. Who could be rigid at the sight of an old pal giving an exact imitation of a pricked balloon? "My dear old man," he said, "because you don't see what's happened to take me to the end of this thing and out the other side is that any reason to suppose that I don't see it? Now look here. It was damned nice of you to hunt me up to have a shot at getting me to go back and eat humble pie and watch Beatrix play about with Greenwood, — Young Greenwood, 'so suggestive of Spring', — but let me tell you at once that you can't do it. You don't see, the family won't see, and probably Beatrix doesn't quite see, that it's over, gone phut. But I saw it last night plainer than I ever wish to see anything again, so don't let's argue. — It's going to make an awful mess and put things badly on the blink, to say nothing of rotting the whole show for me. But I'm for all or nothing, and Beatrix went out of her way to make it dead clear yesterday that 'nothing' is the new watchword. All right then. There's the end. I shall set her free as soon as it can be done. . . ."

"And then what?"

"God knows." He wanted, with the most poignant longing, to ask about the boy, but he couldn't trust himself and let it go. As for Beatrix, he didn't want, at the moment, to know about her. He could still see her, standing in cool and insolent defiance in the hall, eyes laughing, don't-care-two-cents round her mouth. In all probability her eyes were still laughing and she was telephoning to young Greenwood — Greenwood, so suggestive of spring — to come over

and tear up the roads with her. And it made him stick out his chin and bite hard on his determination to accept failure and wind things up. It was the only decent thing to do.

But Malcolm made one more effort. He loved these two, and when he was away from them and sometimes permitted himself to live in a brief dream in which Beatrix lived in *his* house, his compensation for not having been lucky enough to have been the man chosen by her had always laid in the fact that the ideal of marriage had been realized by them. And there was that boy! . . . “‘Nothing’ may have been the watch-word last night,” he said. “But when you left the hall to go to the garage, Beatrix flew at me, cried out that I didn’t understand, that neither of us understood, — and that’s true. We don’t, we’re blunderers. And so, before you go any farther, come back and see if the thread can be mended. Humble pie isn’t a bad diet and while you’re eating it for the sake of all these eighteen months and the result they’ve achieved you may understand enough to let the flag of peace, as Beatrix called it, fly over your house again.”

Pelham shook his head. There was that wall and he wasn’t climbing.

Malcolm warmed to his job, all the same, and certain phrases that Beatrix had used during their talk the previous afternoon, and later, came leaping into his mind like reinforcements. “She may have been getting something out of her system,” he said, “playing a game, the last of her games — the death of her youth, the crossing of the bridge. I don’t know. We neither of us know. Perhaps *she* doesn’t quite know, — but give it a chance and come back. She’s frightfully young, Pel, you must remember that.”

Blunderers both, poor devils, and that last remark, meant so well, stamped Malcolm as the bigger blunderer of the two.

Out it came, that fool complex, touched squarely in the middle. "Yes. Young Greenwood, — so suggestive of spring. Old son, chuck it. It's hopeless to chew it all over. I'm out, I tell you. I understand that. The whole thing was a mistake. She had the pluck to let me see that and it's over. Mafische." He put his finger on the bell.

"Oh, God!" said Malcolm. "What a damned shame. I looked at the success of your marriage as one of the few certainties of life."

To which Pelham had nothing to say. It wasn't necessary because all his grief, homelessness and sense of failure made a sudden havoc of his anger and wounded pride.

And when, after the elevator had come and gone, he went back into his ammonia-reeking bachelor quarters alone, even the oasis of dust, which, in a sort of way, had stood for the past, had been cleared away.

IV

WHAT was the good of hanging about a blistering city and killing a couple of hours until lunch time in a club to which he went so seldom that servants looked at him with suspicion and asked him who he was? There might be a train to take him back to good air and a touch of breeze if he drove to the station at once. His mission had failed.

And so Malcolm crossed the Avenue to the corner at present occupied by the very charming house with the uneven red roof which had been dwarfed utterly by the Gargantuan building on the opposite side, — a house upon which, without doubt, there were fixed several sets of eager desiring eyes, and towards which, in a city in which nothing is permitted to achieve age and tradition, many itching fingers were stretched out greedily for the opportunity to wreck and demolish. In his mind's eye Malcolm could see a building higher, whiter, newer, more grotesque and characterless than the one with the Golden Cock, poking its head into the clouds on the place where that red-roofed landmark now stood by accident or grim determination.

He hailed one of the shoals of yellow taxis that, all with different names, — their correct name was the Yellow Peril, — dodged about the streets like fish in a bowl, and drove to the Grand Central. By the skin of his teeth, but, unfortunately, with nothing to read in order to pass an all-stop journey, he caught a train, and after a bumping that seemed to have been spread over a week of ill-spared life found himself blinking and incredulous on the sun-spotted platform of his destination.

A long drive brought him finally to the house of many wings in which he was immediately aware of being eyed inquisitively and anxiously by the various servants whose functions permitted them to appear on the face of things. The footman, who was on the doorstep at the first sound of the station taxi, searched his face for news. The butler who came forward merely to volunteer the information that lunch was about to be served, nothing more, put him through fifty seconds of microscopic examination. A maid, emerg-

ing from the kitchen, was dramatically arrested in the hall at the sight of dog marks on one of the rugs and while removing these with an elaborate demonstration of horror, seized the opportunity to read in his expression the result of his unadvertised visit to the city of which everybody seemed to know. How it had got about that Pelham had left the house in the small hours of the morning didn't matter. It was most obvious, even to short-sighted Malcolm, that the fact had been the sensation of the day, discussed and rediscussed from every angle, and that the conclusion arrived at by the menage in general was that "something's up." The Great Day had not approached, been celebrated, and gone by without sympathetic understanding by them as by Brownie. Why should it? Nature is just as human in livery as it is in Harris tweeds, and Romance is spelt with the same big R wherever it is imagined.

But Malcolm was no actor. The depression that weighed in his heart was stamped upon his face. Everyone caught it, especially Brownie when she hurried out of her room like an ancient pheasant at the sound of his steps in the corridor.

One eager look was enough. "Ah," she said, seeing the familiar figure of Fate. "I thought so," and went limp in that curious way of hers.

A kind soul, Malcolm, very patient and humanitarian. But somehow, Brownie got rather badly on his nerves. He disliked forboders. "But it doesn't follow that you always think right," he said, with the deliberate intention of putting up a fight.

"It's enough that you've come back alone," she replied, with a sort of gloomy triumph.

"I went to town to see my publishers. Did you

expect me to bring back a member of the firm under my arm? ”

“ It’s no good, Mr. Fraser,” she said, with her fingers wide open, as though, in spite of those good eighteen months, peace and happiness were pouring through like water. “ I’m not to be deceived. Beatrix knows already.”

“ Knows what already? ” Good Lord, anyone would think that this queer little, brown woman revelled in misfortune.

“ I heard her run to her window when your cab drove up. *She’s* seen your face, you know.”

“ Oh, damn my face,” he shouted, as anybody would, and went past her to his room.

It was perfectly true. Beatrix had seen the nice, ugly face of the poet in goggles because she had flown to the window of her bedroom as the coughing Ford made the incline from the gate to the house and stood chugging beneath. And like everybody else she read the word failure that was stamped upon it and immediately locked her door. It was the involuntary action of one who felt the instant need of barricading herself against the misplaced sympathy of Brownie or the belated reproaches of Malcolm. Besides, the fact that she rejoiced in Malcolm’s failure and would probably have to say so to those amazed people would take too long to explain. . . . She had had, to begin with, a very bad night. She had not, as a matter of fact, attempted to cajole sleep or even make herself comfortable by the removal of her clothes, as most women do, especially in a time of great emotional perturbation. She had sat up in the dark, dressed, wondering and wondering. For a long time she had had upon her the startled feeling that numbs the brain of a young thing

who has put a light to a train of gunpowder with which to blow up a hiding place of branches and twigs and stands before the debris of an actual house. She was amazed at the power of this explosion which she had laid down with a too heavy hand, — awed even, for with the roof had gone the pole on which she had expected to run out the flag of truce that morning. Emerging from the thick of the smoke of this she had subjected herself to the soundest mental spanking of which her vocabulary was capable, and was a little astonished to discover in the process how many opprobrious words she knew. Then she had risen, bruised and humble, had cried a little as she paced up and down her lonely room, and had begun to examine the position of things with the minutest care. Her temperamental spree, as Malcolm had called it, had ended in disaster. There was no doubt about that. But out of the ruins came, first, and that instantly, an enormous addition to her already great respect for Pelham. By refusing to stay under the same roof with her after her cold-blooded cruelty, the far-fetched reason of which he was incapable of understanding, as she ought to have known, he had done exactly the right thing, the Pelham thing, and she adored him for it. It showed strength, and with her strength was a fetish. It showed so much more character than the bandying of words and the sulky occupation of separate rooms, especially on such a day. More than that, and that was fine enough, she argued, it showed love, a greater love than he had already abundantly proved himself to possess. And wasn't this the very thing she had set herself, in her roundabout way, to bring out? Of course it was. Hurrah, then things began to look up wonderfully! As for her, she found, as she

went from stone to stone across the stream of argument, that she had never loved him more ardently, more consummately or with a more perfect desire to give. It was true that the bridge of which she had spoken to Malcolm, and she might just as well have been speaking in Dutch — had broken in the middle, but she had crossed the stream by swimming, and girl stuff left behind, she was, she knew now, eager to play the part of a woman. Give her the chance! Very well then, what could result from this foolery, as he loved her and she adored him, but a kissing again with tears? He might stay away from her for a day, or even two days, she told herself. Without prompting from her, Malcolm would certainly go up as a peacemaker, and would fail. Of course, he would fail. And then *she* would go up wearing a new frock and humbleness, and in the simplest possible words tell him of the emotion that had broken out like an illness, the passion excited by the love of love, the last adolescent fling for Romance. Good Heavens, it was such a natural thing that anybody could understand it, even Pel, whose ignorance of women was incredible — but good. Yes, and then *she* would go up, and stepping out of all the egotism and arrogance that she had been trained to as though it were a frock, ask to be forgiven and cry out her love for him, and respect, and liking, and desire, and bring him home again. This was the first of their misunderstandings, — and it should be the last.

Having arrived at this height, after dawn had broken through, it was absurd to think of sleep. She was far too happy to miss a fraction of a moment of it, and instead of going to bed went mentally through all the processes of dressing, leaving, going

to town, confessing and being held against a blazing heart, over and over again. But finally, just as Brownie tiptoed in at eight o'clock, having herself enjoyed a very bad night after seeing Pelham go to the garage, of which her windows commanded a most excellent view, sleep took her forcibly to bed, and almost before she could slip out of her clothes put her out of dreaming.

It was at a moment when Malcolm was halfway through an uncomfortable lunch, sitting opposite to Brownie, who, in the deepest gloom, sat as though she were making her last meal before leaving a sinking ship, that Beatrix entered, radiant. Very hungry too. A good appetite always follows upon a burst of emotion.

"Good morning, everybody. What perfect weather! Eggs and bacon, please." She divided a smile equally between Malcolm and Brownie and the at-once-alert Alfred, and went on humming the latest popular fox trot, — an American version of a nice old German tune. How useful are the folk songs of that land of composers to the Broadway manipulators of musical plays.

"By Jove, what courage," said Malcolm to himself as Brownie registered the fact that she was acting.

"Give me six bisques, Mally, and I'll take you round the course this afternoon and whack you."

"You'll probably do that playing level," he said, "without much effort."

"Why? Are you trying to suggest that a trip to town has put you off your game? By the way, how's Pel this morning? Did he enjoy his midnight drive?"

"I didn't ask him," said Malcolm, rather shortly, hoping that Beatrix would take a hint and leave

Pelham out of any discussion until Mrs. Keene withdrew. He had made up his mind to report the result of his talk to Pelham without any attempt to minimise its gravity. If Beatrix's high spirits were not mere bravado it would be his unpleasant duty to administer a shock.

But Brownie held her ground to the very end of the meal, not out of curiosity, because the pessimism born of a long series of misfortunes made her perfectly certain that things were in a parlous state, but simply in order to make Malcolm uncomfortable and sit on tenter hooks. She knew that he considered her to be in the way and besides being jealous of him she owed him one for his rudeness in the corridor. And so she sat tight, looking more and more like an old bird deserted by its young as Beatrix went gayly from one subject to another with no apparent realisation of the disaster that she had brought about. It was not until Beatrix rose and went out into the sun on the terrace that the little brown woman returned to her comfortable quarters to stand in the middle of her sitting room and wonder how soon it would be before she was uprooted and required to follow Beatrix back into the Vanderdyke house, in which she always had been tortured with a hideous desire to perform a series of irreverent antics in order to smash up the pompous monotony of royal retirement. It was certain that they couldn't continue to live under Pelham's roof after what must have happened last night.

Then Malcolm, screwing himself up to break the news, went out into the sun.

And Beatrix ran her hand through his arm and fell into step with him. She was in one of those thin silk canary-colored sweaters that only one girl in a

million should venture. It went rather nicely with her hair it was true, but, was, nevertheless, a risky experiment. "Let's see. This is Wednesday," she said. "On Saturday morning I'm going to ask Pel to arrange to take me for a fortnight on the *Galatea*. I want to show baby all the islands on the way to Bar Harbor, too."

But Malcolm's enthusiastic agreement with this nice domestic plan, for which she waited confidently, was not forthcoming. It was her way of telling him, in a few words, that she was going to use Thursday and Friday to bring about a complete reconciliation, and she put into her voice a quiet, wifely-motherly note which could not fail to prove to him that her temperamental upheaval had passed away, leaving her sane and contrite.

"Don't you like the idea?" she asked with a touch of impatience.

Feeling like a man who has been sent to an unsuspecting wife to tell her of the death of her husband, Malcolm fumbled for words. "It would have been a good idea yesterday," he said. "But things have happened since then." He was vague and awkward because, although his sympathies were all with Pelham, he felt like a butcher now that he was in the presence of this obviously repentant girl whom he loved to the end of loving.

"I know," said Beatrix. "But other things are going to happen before Saturday that will wipe them out. Don't you gather that?"

"I'm afraid they won't wipe them out, my dear. It isn't so easy as all that."

Beatrix stopped and faced him. "What do you mean?" she asked. Poor Old Mally! How little he

knew about the power of women to make things easy when they choose to exert the full strength of charm and generosity as she intended to do during the next two days. Probably one would be enough, an hour of one.

"I mean," he said, rushing to the point, "that Pelham isn't in the mood for the *Galatea*, Bee. When he left you last night — this has to be said — he didn't leave you till to-morrow or Saturday. He left you for good."

Beatrix laughed. What absurd things had these two been saying, putting their funny old heads together? She could see them making a mountain out of a mole hill, both grave and strong, and laying down the law through clouds of tobacco smoke, standing alternately in the limelight, until the moment when Pelham, announcing his ultimatum, sent Malcolm back to deliver it to her. It was a naïve scheme to frighten her and make her rush to town in a frightful fatigue, there to be forgiven after a tearful apology and a declaration of love. Well, he should have it most sincerely. It was what he deserved.

But the laugh angered Malcolm, because it seemed to him to show a heartlessness and flippancy that didn't belong to this business. "You're going to be surprised to hear," he said, "that Pel's going to spend the next fortnight with his lawyers for the purpose of setting you free. After which he's coming with me to Paris." It was out, brutally.

"It's a joke," said Beatrix.

"If you knew Pel as well as I do you wouldn't say that. And you wouldn't be able to say it if you realized how frightfully you hurt him yesterday. To all the arguments that I put up on your behalf — and I

fought hard — he had only one statement to make. ‘It’s over,’ he said. ‘The whole thing was a mistake. I’m for all or nothing and she let me see that nothing is the watchword. I’m out. It’s over.’ And he *is* out and it *is* over. It’s too late for you to do anything to mend the thread. You’ve broken it, and it’s a damned shame.” And he turned away stirred to deep emotion, walked to the end of the terrace and stood looking down at the garden from which all the color seemed to him to have gone.

And without an instant’s pause Beatrix followed him, put her hands on his shoulders and a laughing face within six inches of his own. “I tell you that it’s a joke,” she repeated. “What rot for him to say that he’s too old. Of course, he’s for all or nothing. So am I. The whole thing was not a mistake. It was and is the best and most wonderful thing that’s ever happened on this earth. He couldn’t set me free under any law in existence now or any that could be invented by the most spiteful brain to deal especially with me. I’ll fight like a cat never to be set free. So, my dear old Mally, far from being over, it’s only just beginning, and I’ll bet you every blessed thing I have, and am ever likely to have, that Pel and I and baby go aboard the *Galatea* on Saturday morning for a little trip to Heaven. Will you take me?”

And when, in utter amazement, Malcolm backed away and looked at this young, wise, triumphant creature with her hair gleaming in the sun, and her eyes full of laughter and assurance, he gave it up, he laid down his arms in a metaphorical pile in front of her and stood, as all men stand before such women, helpless.

And he made such a comic-pathetic figure in his goggles and amazement that she laughed again, touched

his cheek with her lips as a reward for his well-meant but useless efforts, and danced away to make her plans for an encircling movement upon Pel.

V

BUT, — and there is always a but — there were two factors in the existing state of this matrimonial affair which were not going to make things quite so easy as Beatrix took for granted. There was the wounded vanity that had not only rushed Pelham back to his bachelor quarters but had put him into the dangerous spirit that creates a hunger strike and makes a martyr.

And there was our wee friend May.

Having returned to town with Elizabeth McKenzie from the Vanderdyke house, May happened that afternoon to be undergoing the enforced rest cure that is always to be obtained when people are rash enough to attempt to drive up or down the Avenue. Seated in the McKenzie car, having dropped the enthusiastic Elizabeth at the headquarters of the Dug-Out, she was chewing the cud of bitter reflection. There was no doubt as to the fact that Beatrix, in their first bout, had knocked her under the ropes. With a certain amount of admiration and sportsmanship she acknowledged her defeat and was already wondering upon which of the McKenzie's men acquaintances she should commence the well-known tactics of the female spider. Pelham Franklin was not only too well protected — by Jove, that grey-blue girl! — but was the

possessor of the sort of single-track brain that she had never met in any other man. Never. He was out, bad luck to it. He would have been so precisely right too at this tricky stage of her career, with all that money. Well, it meant beginning all over again, — next time, if she could wangle it, with one of McKenzie's banker friends who had passed into the dangerous age of forty-five, — a man who had been contentedly married for twenty years, had been so concentrated upon the making of money that he had had no spare moments in which to realize that all the best years of his life had been sacrificed and who, suddenly panic stricken at the sight of white hairs and a bulging waistcoat, turns round and rushes back to catch the ecstasies of a desperate youth and falls headlong at the feet of spring. What a pity to have achieved Franklin's friendship and admiration and then to have had "Road closed" put up by Beatrix in so completely capable a way. Ah, well, well, that's what it was to be a parasite, one who worked harder to earn a living by not working than those who worked. In the only way open to her she would now have again to set about the realization of her life-long dream, — the beautiful house, the rare old furniture, the exquisite china, the soft-footed servants, the rustling gowns, the total freedom from sordid money worries. How crowded the Avenue was. In any other city, except, perhaps, Paris, in the Rue de la Paix, or the Boulevard des Italiennes, so many people would indicate the celebration of an event, — the return of a Royal son, the burial of a much-hated President, the triumphant conclusion of a bloodless revolution. And how odd it seemed to pass a succession of the same profiles only to be passed by them when the blazing eye in the

forehead of the police box brought all the cars to an abrupt standstill, and gave the great street the uncanny appearance of having been suddenly frozen. She became interested in one face and then another and presently in the small head and square shoulders of — no, yes — Pelham, walking aimlessly, with lips tight, under the well-known small moustache. Pelham, of all men, here in town, on such an afternoon, with something about him, all about him, that gave out depression and homelessness and the damn-all of one who had lost interest in life to so great an extent that it was a wonder that he was not followed by a procession of stray dogs and deserted cats and wandering failures. What in the name of all that was amazing . . .

With a burst of short-lived energy the car swept by and with her head over her shoulder, like Lot's inquisitive wife, wee May watched the tall wiry figure among the swarming humanity. And then, brought to a halt once more, saw him come on and on, with his eyes on the pavement, oblivious of everyone, until he passed, again, along the huge gully that was glorified by a sky as blue and cloudless as that which hung over Cairo.

"That rift," she said to herself, with excitement and the hope that belongs to gamblers and antique dealers and women without bonds. "It's widened. There's been a row. He's hurt and angry and miserable. Oh, ye Gods, for the chance to get even with that confident girl, that grey-blue girl, and find a slit in the armor of this one-eyed man!"

She opened the door of the stand-pat car and got out. "I'm going to walk home," she said. "Perhaps you'd better go back and wait for Mrs. McKenzie,"

and away she went after Pelham like a fish against the stream.

"One of the crazy ones," thought the chauffeur, to whom walking, when engines had conquered, was a fool's game.

"Oh, hullo, Pel," she said, touching his arm with friendly fingers.

And like one who finds water in a desert Pelham stopped and turned and grasped the little hand. "By Jove, this is good," he said, thankful to discover among that surging mass of strangers one familiar face. "What are you doing? Where are you going?"

"Nothing — nowhere," she answered, but with the old courageous smile.

"May I catch on?"

"I wish you would. I'm desperately lonely."

"So am I. Come to the Plaza and have tea and if you're not doing anything to-night dine with me and do a show or something. Can you?"

Could she? Watch her jump! But to him, this man so eager for companionship who was accustomed to having his own way, it was loyalty to her sex not to be too easy. "Not to-night, I'm afraid," she said.

"Why not?"

"Well, I'm still with the McKenzies, you see, and I've a vague idea that I'm dining out with them."

"Oh, scratch it," he said, going forward with horror to an echoing apartment.

"I wonder if I dare."

"Why not?"

"At any rate, I'll come to tea, and when I see Elizabeth and find exactly how things stand I'll ring you up. She's been so sweet to me I wouldn't put her in a hole for anything on earth — even you." She was

utterly free and so could well afford to stand on rectitude.

"Thanks. I can't stick this place alone. It gives me the creeps."

"Don't I know!" she said, putting into her voice so pictorial an expression of sympathy and understanding that no other words were necessary to paint her similar loose-endedness.

"This is good indeed."

And as they were caught in the tide that went sweeping up the street a sense of thankfulness pervaded both of them.

VI

AND so they dined together.

The place with a French name and French cooking and a small French orchestra that played small French tunes managed, in spite of all this conscious effort, to achieve an atmosphere that was almost French. Something of the artificial naughtiness was there, the cunningly simulated *méchanceté* that is the keynote of every successful restaurant in the city of successful restaurants, — the lace on the windows, the numerous screens, the seclusion of corners, the subtle sympathy of the *maître d'hotel*, the faint suggestion of chypre and garlic, the inarticulation of another man's wife. In spite, too, of the fact that Pol Roger came to the tables in cups. But it *was* Pol Roger and finally it *was* Napoleon brandy and the cups gave both an added flavor.

They hadn't much to say. There was no out-

pouring, no mutual burst of ego. Fourth walls were permitted tactfully to stand. But there was companionship which put a welcome stop to introspection and broke the endless chain of inward argument. And there was the necessity to think for someone else for a change, which utter loneliness prevents. They said the sort of things that didn't matter and laughed at nothing, taking care to skate very clear of the thin ice of confidence. It was as though both had become unhitched from the main line, and, while waiting to be taken on again, killed time pleasantly on the siding. Pelham worked for that mental and physical attitude and his wee friend May was quick to take the hint. She was as expert as a hardened stock actress in the picking up of cues.

They dawdled, and, like people who saw the lock ahead at which they were bound to land, back-watered from time to time. They were, finally, almost the last of all the couples to be eyed with increasing impatience by tired waiters. But it was not until the little band of four musicians wound up their programme with "J'en ai Marre" and went away to eat, that Pelham reluctantly looked at his watch. "I've got two seats for the "Chauve Souris," he said. "Do you think we'd better go?"

"Oh, I don't know. Is it worth while now that it's so late? I rather hate to go to a show when half of it is over. Can't we wander in somewhere and smoke?" All the evening she had been willing him to take her to his rooms. There, in the quiet, she might tempt him into an explosion, a statement of the facts. Because something was up. She knew that. Something had happened to his domestic lute. There was, from her point of view, a most convenient rift,

that was obvious. The man was wounded. There was shrapnel in his soul. She was a good little nurse.

"My apartment is livable once more," he said, "if it wouldn't bore you there. A small army's been at work all day. I can't say more for it than that it is clean."

She began to gather up her things, — fan — it was very hot, — handkerchief, vanity case. She was one of those wise women who refrain from going through the rather too intimate processess of renovation before the man whose fastidiousness she respected. "Why not?" she said, casually. "Anywhere will do, — away from crowds and jazz. I know nothing that puts me into such depths of melancholy as the wailing oboe and the suicidal minor key of South Sea music."

And so Pelham paid the bill and removed the pained expression from his waiter's face. And when he put the light cloak about May's white shoulders, he noticed, for the first time, the sweet-pea coloring of her hair and face, the daintiness and delicacy of her body and frock, the unusual absence of jewels. What a tiny thing she was, with the pluck and courage, he remembered, of a man, — some men.

Out in the dimly-lit foyer of that well-run place, Pelham was met by a maid with his hat, who wore the pour boire smile. The sympathetic maître d' hotel bowed them into the street. "*Enchanté de vous revoir*," he murmured, adding without words but with the merest turn of the hand, "Remember, we are discretion itself."

The night was clear and fine, but the day's heat still clung to the deep gullies of the city, and the carbonized air was dead. They turned into Madison Avenue somewhere in the middle Forties and walked slowly up.

The countless little shops that exhibited a chair, a screen and a piece of brocade, though closed, were lighted up and gave the street frequent notes of color and cheerfulness, — except perhaps to those who wondered how they lived. The nerve-wracking smash and rattle of the trolley-cars seemed harder and more blatant now that other traffic had almost ceased to compete.

“ You’re going home to-morrow, I suppose, — lucky man, to have such a charming place.” She dropped the remark in the tone of one who didn’t really want to know but spoke to keep the ball going.

“ No,” said Pelham shortly.

A quick glance showed the tight mouth under the small moustache. He was not yet in the mood to open up and she was not so tactless as to force her foot into a door that he would resent her opening. But her heart jumped at his answer, and her spirits rose high at his naïve implication at what she called the rift. By Jove, she’d give her pearl earrings to know what had happened. But, after all, why should she? They were imitation, it was true, but why give anything when the fact remained that what had happened had brought new hope to her melting bank account. And, somehow, as they stood for a moment on the step of the apartment house in the Avenue the fantastic height of the building opposite did not overwhelm her new gust of optimism by making her feel as small as an ant and of as little account. On the contrary. Her eyes followed the perpendicular lines not from the top downwards but from the bottom upwards, and with her eyes her spirits went. It was the secret of New York’s inspiration, the magnetic influence of the rising line to lift the chin and start the growth of

wings and give exhilaration to people dwarfed and engulfed in alley-ways.

The matronly nude who looked as though she were carrying a jug of hot shaving water to her husband's bathless room stood out plumply against the glowing lights of the Plaza, the model wife.

Pelham let himself in after a panicky search in every pocket for an elusive latch-key. A rather strong but essentially hygienic aroma of floor polish, moth balls and ammonia assailed them in the hall.

"Oh," said May. "How nice."

"Yes, now," said Pelham with a laugh. "You ought to have seen it last night. My God, the dust! . . . It still seems to me to perspire under the feverish energy of the regiment of people who've been working here all day."

"I love your heads and your horsey prints and your man-like furniture." She went to the middle of the large high sitting room, pivoted slowly round and chuckled. "It looks to me like the home of a modern Robinson Crusoe in which no woman has ever trespassed before. Man Friday — where is he?" She might as well know at once if they were the only inhabitants.

"Coming to-morrow," said Pel, "from an employment agency. A Jap probably. Let me take your cloak."

So they were alone. Good. The unreadable books, the leather chairs, the model of the *Galatea*, the collection of sporting guns, the silver cups, and all those staring heads, — she took them in with a kodak eye. In every particular, from carpets to curtains, bachelor. What on earth had brought him back to this?

But for all her cunning and her masterly method of

whipping the stream Pelham refused to snap at her fly. His ingrained loyalty made it impossible for him to discuss Beatrix with anyone except Malcolm. He gave out, briefly, that he was in town for a few weeks on important business and left it at that. But that was enough when it was added to everything that May could so easily deduce from his frequent moments of unutterable depression. And if, in these few weeks, she failed to take every inch of advantage of this unexpected opportunity to entrench herself on Easy Street hers the blame. That was all. She was far too clever to deceive herself into the hope of being able to conduct this friendly reunion into a sentimental intrigue. This man was different from any of those upon whom she had practiced hitherto. The trip on the *Galatea* had made that plain. He was not young enough and not old enough to fall before the enticement of her sex. He was a one woman man, and, therefore, unique. And so her goal was money. She must get it quietly but firmly into his mind, as she had already started to do on the yacht, that it was for him to perform the benevolent work of saving her from earning a living in the oldest profession on earth. In other words, she must give him the golden opportunity to place himself among the philanthropists, so pleasing to every man, and so easy where there is no necessity for deprivation.

Oh, how good, how delicious, to get even with the grey-blue girl!

And then, just as she had made herself as comfortable as it was possible on the man-sized sofa devoid of cushions, and Pelham had gone off on a hunt for the wine-cellar key, Luck smiled for the second time that day.

The telephone bell rang. The instrument stood on a small table in the coat closet in the hall. Its beastly persistence brought her irritably to her feet. She supposed that she would have to take the message, in gratitude for the good bottle of green chartreuse that her host had promised to produce.

"Hullo," she said, with the antagonism that is invariably inspired by this instrument of so-called progress. But at the sound of the clear-cut, charming voice that asked for Mr. Pelham Franklin her small hand went out spasmodically and closed the closet door. No wonder a gleam came into her eyes and a little malignant smile curled up the corners of her mouth!

It was Beatrix speaking . . . Now for some fun!

"Oh, hullo, old thing," she answered. "This is our wee friend May. Pel and I have just had dinner and have come back to talk about you. He's here, at my elbow. Shall I ask him to speak? Yes — no — what? . . . Hullo . . . Hullo?"

She *thought* that that would do it! She *thought* that that would be followed by an utter silence and the dull jab of the other receiver. She could imagine the angry wave of color, the catch of the breath, the amazement.

And when she returned to the sofa, on the tips of her toes, it was with dancing eyes and a glow of triumph. The second bout was hers. . . . The blow she had delivered was on the solar plexus.

Ah! Life has the most gorgeous compensations.

PART VII

I

FOR two mornings running the people who searched the advertisements on the back page of the *New York Times* for capital to invest, capital wanted, business connections, business loans, and business services had noticed, under Miscellaneous, the following message, which switched them, for a moment, out of thoughts of business and flung their imaginations into the field of romance. “*Bluebird, — if you have not forgotten the man who lay in bed number 128 in the hospital at Armentières during May, June and July away back in 1916 send a little feather from one of your wings to the Y.M.C.A. in West 57th Street. V. B.*” After these two insertions the advertisement dropped out, and some of the more kindly people who had read it, between one that called the attention of investors to a beautifully equipped store in the heart of the shopping district, and one that urged the great value and remarkable cheapness of a chinchilla coat which a young widow “found incongruous to her new surroundings”, asked themselves whether it was because the feather had been sent or the man who had occupied bed number 128 had run out of superfluous cash.

As a matter of fact the feather had been sent, an actual feather, though it was not from the wing of a Bluebird but a resentful chicken caught for the purpose of supplying the answer to the appeal as it stalked

about the little garden of a house at Mount Vernon. The envelope containing it was handed to his partner by 'Arry 'Arris at the moment when he was gazing proudly at the Ford limousine, just licensed as a taxicab, which stood in the sun on the street opposite to the Y.M.C.A. building under whose efficient and hospitable roof the two pioneers had been lodging for several days.

"They've found yer," said 'Arry, holding it out.

Beamish, who had forgotten when dressing that morning that taxi drivers are not in the habit of wearing white spats, turned upon the small cockney with raised eyebrows. "Found me? Who?"

"The Vanderbilts. This is an invitation to dinner, I'll lay me shirt on it. An' by a nice bit of fatality, if that's the proper word, I'm the cove wot'll drive you to the family mansion."

Beamish turned the envelope over and over. It was addressed in typewriting and for that reason lacked all personality, like a wax figure in a tailor's shop. "What the devil are you talking about?" he asked.

'Arry laughed and waved his hand towards the cloudless sky. 'Oo wouldn't be light-headed on a mornin' like this 'ere, with the sun burnin' out all the bad microbes and that little darlin' spoilin' to earn bread, butter and marmalade for a couple of 'eroes? " And with a gurgle of pathetic delight and excitement he made a dive at the immaculate Ford and pressed a tender kiss upon her near side mud guard. He might have made a fortune on the vaudeville stage. He had the gift of tragic invention that never fails to win the instant laughter of an easy audience. On top of what had appeared to be a hopeless search for employment in England this absurd action failed to raise a laugh

from Beamish. On the contrary, it stirred him to a queer emotion made up of a combination of hopefulness and an inability to believe that luck had really changed, and that, at last, in a new country, he and his faithful bat-man were on the verge of making an honest living by the sweat of the brow, in the only way by which they were capable of doing so. It was almost too good to be true. He didn't follow the example of his partner and kiss the car, but, impelled by a strong sense of superstition, he did go forward and lay an affectionate and grateful hand on the shining instrument which was going to turn the corner for them, God willing. A faint and struggling renewal of belief in the existence of a Divine power had come back to this man now that the disenchantment of war and peace were beginning to die out of his soul. "Good girl, nice girl," he said, as though talking to a polo pony or a gun.

With perfect understanding of his benefactor's feelings, the unexuberant interpolation of which he put down to Eton and Oxford, 'Arry echoed inwardly the dedicatory prayer that the Major's characteristic simplicity had stood for, and then sprang into the driver's seat, stepped on the self-starter, shouted out "Watch 'er style" and went off down the street in quest of his first fare.

Whereupon Beamish opened the envelope and stood gazing at a short soft feather which had been dyed an imperfect blue in a bottle of ink. To it was tied a small piece of paper on which was written the words "I am perched on a bough on the fourth floor of 425 Fifth Avenue. Come round at one o'clock to-morrow and peck a few seeds with me. C. M."

To-morrow. That meant to-day!

Beamish shot out his left arm, looked at the watch by which he had timed so many of his flights, and so much waste of life, and made a bolt for the building which was what he called his home. Up in his bedroom there was something that he had bought in London the day before he sailed. He had made up his mind to give it to this girl if the case in which it rested became worn and shabby before he found her. And here she was, already. Her feather had fluttered out of a blue sky and fallen into his hands in spite of the fact that he and she might have lived for years within hailing distance in that crowded city and passed each other daily among its multitudes, almost with touching elbows. "What's the matter with everything?" he asked himself, as the elevator tried to keep pace with his rising spirits. "What's happened? Who's spotted me? Why have I suddenly become distinct enough to be picked out among all the ants and treated to this amazing favoritism? I win the Derby, I find 'Arry 'Arris, I buy the Ford. May is as ready to get rid of me as I am to be free from her, and I am shown the way to the Bluebird's nest almost without a search. Somebody's put in a few kind words about this young feller, that's certain."

Pocketing the smart red case, he brushed his hair, straightened his tie, flicked his shoes with a towel, caught a descending elevator, made his way into the street, and headed, walking on air, for the Avenue with twenty minutes in hand.

He had not seen the Bluebird since the morning of his discharge from that hospital five years ago. He had never seen her out of her nurse's uniform and only vaguely remembered that her name, outside the room with its long lines of beds and cloying smell of dis-

infectants, was Carol Magee. But from the moment when he opened his eyes to find himself alive and looked up into that young ecstatic face, and then growing gradually out of utter feebleness and the strange backwash of his interview with Death, had watched her swift, quiet movements in and out, holding to her kindness like a lost child, looking for her gleam of white teeth as a shipwrecked sailor searches for the sight of a sail, relying upon her blessed attentions and cheery voice with dog-like eagerness and jealousy, he had invested her with a beauty and a goodness that put a halo round her nurse's cap and had seen her through a glamor of so deep a respect and gratitude that whenever she came to his side pain and homesickness left him, and like a small boy clutching a mother's protecting hand after a nightmare he felt safe and confident.

Up to the moment of that unbelievable day when guns had ceased to mean anything except the hideous reminders of an easily preventable holocaust on the altar of political blundering he wrote frequent brief and amusing letters to the Bluebird. In these he never said what he thought about the war because he was too sensitive to shock her with outbursts of blasphemy, nor did he ever confess that during all his flights over the wounded earth he had sent out to her mental Marconigrams containing all the love of his heart. There was our wee friend May and she happened to be able to call herself his wife. Answers came to his letters until the morning of the Armistice, when they came no more. But that didn't make any difference. During the rest of his years in Germany and in Ireland, — what was the use of getting deinobbed to rattle a box in Regent Street or draw pictures on the pavement

round a gaping shabby cap? — he built all about this girl a wonderful garden of flowering plants, he conjured her up in all his waking hours as well as his dreams as the epitome of womanhood, the lodestar of his life. He gave her a beauty that was never hers, elevated her gentle firmness, her daily courage, her unremitting service into a nobility that she, like all her sister nurses, had been too much occupied and too unself-conscious ever to worry to achieve. He made her something untranslatable into words, — a romance, an essence, a spirit, an inspiration, a guide, a purifier, and when at last he was able to leave his own country for hers he was burning with a desire to find her again, and, if she were free, and he could achieve freedom, and she could be brought to love him, and he were to have the luck to earn a living, — if, if, if, — to ask her to be his wife.

425 Fifth Avenue, arrived at eventually through the mid-day outpourings of heterogeneous workers, swarming like locusts in search of food, turned out to be one of the older buildings in that amazing street in which so few old buildings are permitted to remain, and its fourth floor was discovered to harbor the office of the staff, stenographers and telephone girl of an illustrated society journal which made its beautifully glistening appearance twice during all the months.

Hesitant and breathless, his white spats gleaming, a thumping heart beneath his well-cut waistcoat, but outwardly as cool and supercilious as a greyhound, Beamish made his way into a large and airy room. The emotion of one who stands on the threshold of Millennium, the summit of a peak, the very end of a road, ran through his veins. Above the roar of traffic that rose to the open windows and the nerve-

rending tapping of type-machines with which the office was filled he seemed to hear the singing of birds.

No one took the slightest notice of him. Not a single head was raised. With a sort of dogged desire to get through the work that they were concentrating upon, the girls, whether they were aware of his presence or not, continued to play their instruments. And so there he remained, hat in hand, smooth hair brushed back, a curious smile under his clipped moustache, a malacca cane arched beneath his weight, looking more like the generally accepted idea of an Englishman about to go racing than the artist, the author or the advertiser whose business brought him to that floor.

How long he would have held his stork-like attitude, waiting politely until someone showed signs of slackness, or made even the most rudimentary effort to recognize his existence, no one can say. He might have been there, apparently invisible, until the good hour of release if a girl had not appeared suddenly from a side room, dressed for the street, quietly and nicely dressed; a girl no longer in the first flush of youth, slight, even perhaps thin and a little frail and tired, with a worn line or two under her large eyes and round a very sensitive mouth. She, at any rate, was not busy although her quick apprehensive glance at the complacent clock denoted that she would have to be before very long.

Beamish ventured to go towards her as she made a swift movement to a near-by desk, and found his voice.

"May I speak to Miss Carol Magee, please?"

"Speaking," she said.

And as they looked into each others' eyes the incessant cantata of city life seemed to cease as though by magic, and into the utter silence the long-forgotten

sounds of groans and a banjo, a high-pitched Cockney voice in delirium, the tinkle of ice in a glass, the boom and shatter of far-off guns, came back. With the never-to-be-forgotten smile she held out her hand. "Major Beamish!"

"Bluebird," he said. "Bluebird!"

What he succeeded in wrenching out of his voice she caught in his eyes, — the shock of disappointment, the amazement, the sympathy. And she nodded and sighed and gave a little laugh. "Uniform does make a lot of difference," she said.

Time and the struggle to live had taken almost all the colors from the plumage of the Bluebird of his dreams, and for that reason he instantly applied her remark to himself. "I know," he said. "That's why I got into my only decent suit."

She thanked him with the pressure of her hand and looked at the clock. "I have only an hour for lunch, so I think we'd better . . ."

"Oh, well then . . ." And he uprooted himself.

Outside, as they stood waiting for the elevator in the narrow passage, he took her hand again and raised it to his lips. "My *dear* Bluebird," he said.

II

"So that's my story," he wound up, giving her the history of Valentine Beamish in the peptonized manner of "Who's Who", since they had said goodbye on the doorstep of the hospital. And as they sat at a small table in the window of one of the innumerable

cafeteria which grow like mushrooms in the city's side streets, she studied this member of the army of "poor boys" who had once come under her care, either to snuff out, creep out, or join up again; one of the countless fighting men upon whom, in the proudest days of her life, it had been her duty and privilege to render cheerfulness and the protective touch of a temporary mother. She would never have imagined him as the man who originated the nickname which had stuck till the end of the war. He was not a man easily forgotten, either, with his smooth hair and high forehead, Wellington nose, tooth-brush moustache, large humorous mouth, strong jaw line and well-set eyes in which there was great kindness. His height, breadth of shoulder, and utter lack of superfluous flesh added to a charming and old-fashioned courtesy gave him a character and a personality that generally impressed themselves. The flying man who had once described Valentine Beamish as the reincarnation of Don Quixote in the clothes of a Sackville Street tailor was a good observer. But even now, among all the pictures that he brought back of those once so vital days and his own comparatively brief entrance into them, his place in the mosaic of her memory was nebulous. She knew his name only because she had looked him up in her diary. It was a long time since 1916. But it happened that he was the only one of her wounded boys whom she had met since her return to America, and her heart went out to him.

"And this is mine," she said. "Home to find myself almost prehistoric among the girls who had grown up since I'd been away. Nowadays a girl of anything over twenty is completely on the shelf and I had already reached that appalling age when I was

caught in London seeing the sights in August 1914. I joined up then, you see, like lots of other Americans who thought it was our job, and so was twenty-five at the end of it all. Hanging about at a loose end was no good to me after having been a certain amount of use and so I went to work. That's all."

Extraordinary. He had expected time to stand still . . . "And where's Mount Vernon?" he asked, so that he might continue to hear her voice.

"Oh, that's where my married sister lives, — a suburb. I go out and spend the night there as often as I can. She has two of the most adorable children. I live in town. I used to share rooms with one of the girls in the office, but as she went to California a week ago I've just moved into an Allerton House with a suit-case. There isn't room for anything else." The old smile to which he had been wont to look forward so eagerly lit up her face once more. It seemed almost a pity that there was not always a war!

"Your father and mother, Bluebird. May I ask where they . . ."

"I have neither," she said, "here. Mother died before I went to England and father, who was a doctor, went over with the Fourth Division, and was killed in one of the air raids on his hospital. He was buried in France. . . . When I hear people say that the war is old stuff . . ." Her voice broke.

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Beamish. Unmarried, alone, working, going out as often as she could get away to see her sister's two adorable children. . . . He meant nothing to her. She had almost forgotten him. But as he looked into the face that he had glorified and crossed all those miles of waters to find, he came out of his long dream into a far better reality, because here

was not a spirit, an essence, but a woman who bore some of the many wounds of life with the courage and uncomplaining of the fighting man, to whom she had devoted those five years of her youth. If he had the luck to win his way into her respect and love, it should be his privilege to tend her as she had tended him so that she should see that there was one man who didn't think that the war was old stuff and who had gratitude. For another and warmer reason, too. The disappointment that had swept over him at his first sight of her, the amazement and the sympathy, all natural enough in the circumstances, had been already replaced by admiration of her brave and uncomplaining acceptance of things, and the fine soul that put a light in her eyes and gave beauty to her face. The almost spiritual love with which he had surrounded her on the little altar of his dreams became human during this meeting and led his thoughts to a little house in some such place as Mount Vernon, in which, some day, there might be two other adorable children. And before they left that crowded eating place for the street and the office one of his many "ifs" had disappeared. She, at any rate, was free.

They went out as they had gone in among a small army of girls, — little girls for the most part, nearly all of whom wore the regulation uniform of the flapper, — a basin hat stuck on the side of an over-curved bobbed head, a thin sweater of Chauve Souris color and design, astonishingly Baedeker-like as a guide to form, a short tweed frock with a fringe which might have been made by a bevy of playful puppies, woolen stockings with the patterns of sugar sticks, flabby and generally uncleaned shoes with rubber soles and no heels. Many of them had pretty faces, but all had

plastered themselves with as much cheap make-up as is used by the anxious harlots on the London streets, — nice, honest, eager, hard-working little people, all of them, who brought to their desks, in many cases, a disconcerting illiteracy, but quick wits and great shrewdness which compensated to some extent for an utter lack of manners and an unconscious misuse of English which had become an argot.

“Do you go out every day at one o’clock?” he asked, delivering her back to the old building in the Avenue.

“Except Saturdays and holidays, yes.”

“Then, unless you have any objection to a perfectly selfish scheme, you’ll find me waiting in the hall for you as often as I can manage it and we’ll sample the food at every restaurant within walking distance.”

“I’d love to,” she said. How lonely this man must be!

“To-morrow then.”

“All right. To-morrow then.”

He slipped into her hand the leather case that he had bought for her and which contained a charming little wrist watch. “You’ll know that I am waiting down here by this,” he said.

And when the jammed-tight elevator, worked by a young colored man with eyes that made one think of two bubbles in a cup of chocolate, had taken the Bluebird back to her typewriter, with a new and delightful interest in life, Beamish edged his way into the equally jammed-tight street.

“Poor little Bluebird,” he said to himself. “How well she deserves a nest and how hard I’ll work to give her one.”

At six o’clock that night when ‘Arry ‘Arris came

back from his first adventure, wearing the grin of an accidental terrier after the discovery of an unexpected bone, Beamish was pacing up and down his street with his hands behind his back and his face turned up to the cloudless sky.

“Any luck?” he asked eagerly.

“Marvellious,” replied 'Arry, nipping out of the Ford. “Twelve dollars and fifty-five cents.”

“No!”

“Swelp me Bob, partner,” and he handed it over to the head of the firm. “But, oh, God!”

“What?”

“To get along these streets without being cracked like a nut or smashing into something and getting spilt like a bean you 'ave to be a Douglas Fairbanks, I'll tell yer that! What with trucks and tram-cars, 'orse drays and pillars, pros and rank amertoors it's a miracle to get through. And then the cops! One word about these 'ere. If it ever comes to the point of 'aving to open yer mouth, talk with an Irish accent or you're as good as dead.”

“Right,” said Beamish, getting in. “Go and have dinner and put in a good evenin'. You won't see anything of me until I've beaten your record by forty-five cents, old man. So long.” And off he went, without giving the glistening Ford time even to say its prayers.

III

It was with a small thrill of excitement that, crossing Broadway to go through Fifty-seventh Street to

the Grand Central there to hang about for a fare, Beamish saw the hiring hand of a man standing on the wide corner, an instantly likeable man, tall, broad shouldered, dressed in obviously English clothes, wearing large horn-rimmed glasses, and a very worried expression on his nice ugly face. A girl was with him, the first sight of whom drew from Beamish the one word angel.

Obeysing the signal to draw up on the opposite side with the Ford's blunt nose directed towards the Avenue, Beamish waited while his first customers negotiated the crossing. "Luck," he said to himself exultantly, "is with me. I'm the little friend of all the world," and tilted his dump hat at an even more rakish angle.

"You know those garage people," Malcolm went on, opening the door. "When they say an hour they mean two. But that doesn't matter. We've got to talk and I'll have dinner sent up to my rooms."

"It does matter," said Beatrix. "There's baby. I shan't be able to go in to say 'good-night' to him and I dare not imagine what he'll think of me for cutting that ceremony. However, under the circumstances, he's a fortunate boy to *have* a mother. It was a very near go, Mally." And she got in.

"Forty-four West Forty-fourth Street," said Malcolm and followed her.

It had been, indeed, a very near go. An urgent telephone call from Malcolm had brought Beatrix to town in her car. There was the vital need of a consultation about Pelham and his hard and fast determination to accept failure and cut the knot. Meeting Malcolm at his club at half-past five it had been decided that he should drive back to the country with

her and talk the whole thing over on the way, then dine and return to town by the last train. It was necessary for Beatrix to order something in Forty-second Street and so they had driven up Sixth Avenue. A motor truck had swooped out of a side street and with the lawless intention of crossing at all costs had collided with the car before it could jam on its brakes, smashed a hole in the chassis and showered its occupants with broken glass and splinters. By the grace of God Beatrix and Malcolm were unhurt and the battered car had been taken to the nearest garage for temporary patching under the blasphemous supervision of the chauffeur, whose latent dislike of trucks had now dropped into an active and lifelong hatred. Who can wonder?

“How do you feel now, Bee dear?” Poor old Mally. The tone was in every sense of the word parental, but there was nothing remotely parental in the desire to take the escaped girl in his arms and hold her to a heart that was consumed with love.

Beatrix was sitting with her hands clasped, a grave and rather awed expression, with her eyes first on one side of the street and then on the other with a curious intensity and interest.

“I don’t quite know, old boy,” she said, starting to work it out. “Astonished, mostly. It doesn’t seem believable that we’re not dead, — not in the place that people have killed each other about ever since there were priests. I’m glad we’re not because it’s so ugly. . . . When that truck bore down upon us like a liner out of the fog I said to myself, ‘Then this is death’, and I threw my spirit into the nursery and then all the way back to Pel because it was my last chance to say I love you, I love you. Then the crash, the

pause, the anticipation of physical pain that never came, the sensation of the spirit coming back into my body, — I was so certain that I was going to be killed that I had died in imagination. And now here we are, driving to your rooms, just as alive as we were before, and in exactly the same ghastly mess. Have you noticed the angle of our driver's hat? ”

This mixture of seriousness and flippancy was nothing new to Malcolm. It had been this girl's method of protecting her emotion ever since the days when he had taught her to skate. It was easy to see, however, that she had been through an experience that would recur again and again in her dreams, that her whole system had been shaken as by an earthquake. A good deal to his surprise, because Beatrix compelled his adoration, Malcolm was sympathetic but not sorry, and this he intended to tell her at the earliest opportunity.

More by the judgment of the white-spatted taximan than luck, they arrived at the bachelor apartment house without another accident, but not without another, although a slighter, shock. Beamish, lamentably unaware that manners and courtesy are not included in the license of a cab-driver, was out, open door in hand, before Malcolm could make a move. Looking like a modern Sir Galahad in his most inappropriate clothes he assisted his patrons to the pavement with a deference so graceful and patrician that it took their breath away and filled Malcolm with a sense of shyness which made all question of haggling an offense. And so, dreadfully uncomfortable and apologetic, he ventured to tender a five dollar bill and having swung himself up to that, bolted after the wondering Beatrix and hoped that the episode was ended.

It wasn't, because Beamish, failing to grasp the black-mailing asset of his disconcerting knightliness, followed him into the building. "I beg your pardon, Sir," he said. "You forgot to wait for change," and this he handed over to the goose-fleshed Malcolm from the spoils of 'Arry 'Arris. After which an Embassy bow, a friendly smile and a perfectly cool retreat.

The inscrutable parrot gave Beatrix the sort of ironical and Billingsgate welcome that the Prime Minister of England receives from the Labor benches when he rises to address the House. He was, in fact, so objectionable that Malcolm, strangling a strong desire to give the ancient offender to the elevator boy, removed the cage to the very limit of his rooms and shut both intervening doors. He returned to find Beatrix standing rather limply in front of a photograph of Pelham, an enlargement of a very happy snapshot which had caught him, hatless, sun-tanned and as fit as a fiddle, at the end of a drive, a sprawling shadow behind him on the close cropped tee and a perfectly detailed background of the undulating course over which he had played with her so often in what Malcolm was already thinking of as the good old days. . . . Damned shame!

And having studied the picture over her shoulder for a few minutes, he began self-consciously to say the things that were running through his mind. "Can you imagine *that* man, born to be in the open with a club or a gun, messing about a city in weather like this, lunching, dining and doing theatres with a cunning little woman who has caught him at a loose end and has grabbed at the chance to fasten on him like a mosquito?"

"No," said Beatrix, "I simply can't."

“Well, that’s what you’ve brought about, my dear, and that’s what I called you into Town to discuss. Sit here and I’ll put this cushion behind you. The poor old sofa’s seen its best days and if you don’t know its tricks you may be very uncomfortable on a broken spring.”

But Beatrix ignored the sofa and selected an upright chair with arms. “Why pretend that you want me to be comfortable?” she said. “You don’t like me and you’re all on the side of Pel,” and she sat down, having achieved the purpose of every woman who knows that she is completely in the wrong of making the man who is about to do his best to put her right feel like a worm.

Malcolm deliberately sat on the spring. What an extraordinary thing it is that the man who is most generous with the blessings of friendship should be required invariably to pay twice for his gift.

“Then too,” she went on, letting him see that she hated the chair, “why bring me to Town to talk about May Beamish? I’ve known all that for three days.”

With that one calm statement she undermined all the horrible importance of the information that Malcolm had conceived it his duty to impart. “How?” he asked, in amazement, perfectly certain that she had not descended to such depths of disloyalty as to have had Pelham watched.

“The night I rang him up at his rooms to ask him to come back and to tell him that I never meant to hurt him so much she answered the telephone and threw down the gauntlet.”

“And on the . . . the top of that you . . . you let her go on?”

“You don’t know Pelham as well as I do, Mally,”

she said, making him realize that so far as that went she, and not he, was all on the side of Pel.

If he had not been so desperately eager, so deeply and sincerely anxious to mend this broken thread, holding marriage, and especially this particular marriage, to be the most beautiful and the most essential of all human relationships, to preserve and protect which every mortal effort should be strained, he would have cried out, "Shoot, I give it up", and retired. But he adored Beatrix and Pelham was his only pal. To bring them together again was now the one object of his life, little as either of them seemed to deserve it. He rose in his wrath and let go.

"You may know Pel better than I do," he said, standing over her in great indignation, but with his tie a little crooked and his hair in a comic feather — he was one of those men who never considered it necessary to brush the back of his head — "I'm not going to argue about that, but you don't know very much about man. You proved that on the great day by putting Pel to such a frightful test and you've proved it since by leaving him in the hands of this woman. Under any other conditions you could afford, perfectly well, to sit tight and carry on, at peace with the world. But under the conditions that you deliberately worked up Pel, like every other one of us, being starved and humiliated and not giving a single curse, chucks himself away with all the fine things that he ever held to and stood for. He cuts off his nose to spite his face. He degrades himself for the ghastly pleasure of being revenged on life. It's the natural reaction and to my way of thinking he couldn't revenge himself better than with a woman eager to retrieve her former failure to catch him on the hop. If you wanted to bring about

another scandal, if for some uncanny reason you had made up your mind to break up your home and lay in utter ruins one of the few marriages which had everything to make it succeed, then, of course, you've gone the right way to work. But if you've been fooling, if all this is really the outcome of a temperamental spree, as you make me believe that it was, then all I can say is that you've let it carry you into a disaster that may never be wiped out. When you heard that woman's voice on Pel's 'phone, in justice to all your best memories of his love and the result of it which makes you so proud, you should have dashed to the rescue and humbled yourself. You owed it to God and the angels. As it is . . .” He flung up his hands and went over to the window, at the end of his burst.

What was the use? He had delivered himself of a tirade that was probably as ridiculous as all his others to this ancient girl, this product of a spoiling system, this representative of modern feminine youth that jeered at experience, had no respect for age, no patience with tradition, no sympathy for all the old stuff of a former generation and who went through life with a selfishness and an individualism that left friends and parents angry, frightened and stultified.

“As it is,” said Beatrix, joining him at the window and putting her hand on his arm, “although I agree with you that I have behaved like a fool and ought to be whipped for indulging in a temperamental kink that I can never make anyone understand, I am more certain than ever that Pel loves me and therefore I have absolute faith in his loyalty. I may know very little about man but I know everything about my man. He loves me, he loves me, he left me because he loves me, he's staying away now because he loves me and he's

only going about with our wee friend May because he's so lonely and misses me so frightfully. You don't think much of me, dear old Mally, and you have very good reasons for your opinion. I know that, perfectly well. But all this *had* to happen, it simply had to. It's a part of the illness that girls go through and I can no more explain it to you than I can fly over the moon. All I can now ask you to do is to take my word for it that I've recovered, that I'm most awfully sorry and that I'm going most humbly to ask Pel to forgive me and come back. There is only one thing that I want to do with all the rest of my life and that is to be a good wife to Pel and a good mother to his baby — a good woman for ever more."

All this was said so quietly, but with so deep an underlying emotion of ecstasy, by one whose voice, attitude and very appearance not only showed recovery but growth, understanding and a glorious faith, that it carried the poor old worried poet into a most un-Fraserly deed. It made him seize that young slim form in his arms and imitate the far too affectionate method of the bear. It made him give a whoop of hopefulness and joy, and ignore the fact that a well balanced hat hates nothing so much as to be disturbed. It was a good thing that the parrot, with his appalling vocabulary, was not a witness to the scene.

"And now," said Beatrix, rectifying the damage without the assistance of a glass, — there was no such useful thing among the nice conglomeration of Malcolm's possessions, — "take me to see Pel. Give me ten minutes with him to show what I've become, and we'll all drive home together."

IV

THE dark clouds which had been moving slowly and sullenly towards New York during the last hour had, by this time, blotted out the blue sky and the generous sun, and as Beatrix and Malcolm appeared on the steps of the building from which the parrot observed life from the fifth floor windows, broke. Down came such sheets of torrential rain that almost in an instant streams began to pour along the gutters and the appearance of the city was changed in a flash. Straw hatted men minus waistcoats and women in light summer clothes disappeared as though by magic to herd under friendly awnings and crowd together in doorways. In one dramatic moment the pavements of Fifth Avenue were as empty as they only are in the early hours of the morning and its ever-moving crowds, driven into individualism by the heavy whip of self-protection and the urgent need of earning a livelihood, were surprised into becoming spectators of a burst of egotism on the part of a force greater than themselves, called to a sudden halt in their day's rush by a temperamental outpouring over which none of the latest inventions of their enterprising country had the slightest control. One could feel the resentment and impatience of all these people, brought to a halt in their desire to keep dry and unspoilt, at this deliberate interference with their movements, this autocratic power which held them in a wrathful staticism if only for ten minutes. Those who were unable to bear the

restraint rushed into empty taxis and were carried in triumph to a probably unnecessary destination. Others, victims to the habit of keep moving, dodged ignominiously from cover to cover. The rest, fuming and fretting at what was, in reality, a great refreshment to an overheated city, stayed where they had placed themselves and watched the rain toe-dance along the street and bounce up from the roofs of the procession of cars.

Malcolm hailed a cab which had set down a customer at the hotel opposite to his building. It reeked with the noisome aroma of a cheap cigar, but it was better than no cab at all and infinitely better than killing valuable time on a doorstep until one that was spruce and hygienic happened to pass. Before they had been locked and unlocked often enough to achieve a sight of the Plaza the rain had ceased as abruptly as it had begun, and the Avenue had resumed its normal condition as though the controlling hand of nature's policeman had fallen to his side.

If Malcolm had been a superstitious man and Beatrix had not been so confident of her gift to mend, they might both have been a little anxious because no blue had come back into the sky.

It was half past six. It was pretty certain, therefore, that Pelham would be in his rooms. The uniformed man in the hall, easily mistaken for the Commodore of a yacht club, touched his peaked cap to Malcolm and nodded the statement, without going to the unnecessary trouble of putting it into words, that "our mutual friend has been in some time. Go right up, Sonny." A brotherly person.

The elderly elevator man, trying as usual to disguise the fact that his job required less intelligence than any

that could be devised beneath the earnest concentration of one performing a great mechanical feat, took them right up and let them out with a deprecatory smile as who should say, "Yes, I know, but practice makes perfect even in this line of work, which breaks the nerve of all but superman. You're welcome."

Beatrix rang the bell and gave Malcolm an encouraging smile. The door was opened briskly by a Jap whose beautiful bed-side smile turned into an expression of indignant surprise as these, to him, utter strangers passed with the proprietary air of prohibition agents to whom no place is sacred. Pelham's hat and stick were on the hall table and the homely aroma of pipe tobacco hung in the air. Breathing this in with a sort of emotion Beatrix touched the hat with loving fingers and led the way eagerly into the sitting room. Not one of the glassy eyes of all those heads warned her of the shock that she was to receive. Not one.

Sitting at Pelham's desk, with the brazen confidence of a mistress, wearing an evening frock in which she looked far more attractive and charming than any woman, neither wife nor sister, has the right to look in a bachelor's rooms, was our wee friend May. She had just finished addressing an envelope, — a Pelham envelope, — and was in the act of placing the sticky part to the tip of a small but vastly capable tongue when she heard the unexpected approach of intruders, looked up and saw — Good Lord, the grey-blue girl and the man who didn't like her and made no bones about it! What the . . .

Beatrix buckled as the hot needle of jealousy with its long nasty thread went clean through her heart. The sight of this extraordinarily pretty person so blatantly in possession seemed to substantiate Mal-

colm's point about man. But only for one bad moment. Her absolute belief in Pelham's love and loyalty swept this feeling away like a tidal wave. It was part of May's gold-digging scheme to take advantage of this muddle of misunderstanding, and the way to face the situation was to treat her presence lightly and as a perfectly natural thing. And so she said, making a quick recovery, "Oh, how very nice to find you here," with her best hostess smile, and as though she had gone out for an hour and returned to greet a welcome visitor who had dropped in for a cup of tea.

It was done with such supreme imperturbability and everyday coolness that Malcolm, who had on many previous occasions laid all his hats at her feet, showered round her, metaphorically, every page of manuscript upon which he had, in an agony of brain-birth, tried to write something of which she might be proud. *He* had caught the catch of her breath at the sight of this much too sweetly pretty little bundle of tricks. *He* had received her sweep of anger at the insufferable cheek of this usurpation of Pelham's desk, if you please, perhaps the most intimate of personal things. Hasn't it been said, over and over again, that he loved her to the end of loving?

May, too, paid an inward compliment to this perfect piece of savoir faire. "Well played," she said to herself, "oh, very well played," catching the ball with a back-hand stroke and cutting it over the net. The grey-blue girl was devilish clever but could she compete in this game?

"I saw you driving early this afternoon, and rather hoped you might drop in. Yes, this is particularly nice, especially as you have brought our dear old Mally. A family party, isn't it?"

Not because of the insincere familiarity towards himself, which, of course, he didn't miss, — she loathed him, he knew, — but wholly because of the nasty innuendo in which she had wrapped her cunning answer, Malcolm turned hot and cold. Elizabeth McKenzie had foisted a queer collection of wastrels on her friends in New York, from singing Russians who slobbered over women's hands, to dud Englishmen who had been permitted, with great unnational wisdom, to secure passports; but by having brought Mrs. Valentine Beamish into the Franklin circle she had gone to the limit of her carelessness. And more than ever it seemed to Malcolm that Pelham had let himself down in the general respect by having anything to do with such a woman, notwithstanding the mental attitude into which he had been flung, and he held his breath while Beatrix gathered herself together for a kill. For very much less than this he had often seen her apply her verbal steel.

But Beatrix had arranged a method of fighting wee May, and that was not to allow her the satisfaction of being regarded as an opponent at all, but as a rather comic and harmless person who was making an abortive struggle to worm her way into the good graces of a man immune from her feminine wiles. And so, with only the flick of an eyelash, she held May's eyes and laughed. "What a funny little soul you are," she said. "Have you always had the capacity to act the leading parts in the plots of your imagination? If this is the scene of your latest play may I suggest that you open another window? It's a little stuffy here."

It was a well-judged hit. An abnormally developed sense of humor had never succeeded in getting rid of May's immense dislike of ridicule. She had had so

much of it from her brothers. But she covered an inward squirm with a quick assumption of fussy domesticity and another broad stroke of suggestiveness. "I'm sorry," she said, "I told our temporary Jap to close the windows while the storm was on, but he doesn't believe in fresh air and I have to round him up like a sheep-dog. Please, Mally," and she illustrated her desire with a sketchy gesture.

This reiterated indication of proprietorship, this laboured attempt to plant the impression of belonging to Pelham's apartment was outrageous and disgusting, but stupidly overdone. It even seemed to Beatrix, knowing Pel, to be pathetic, because in a series of flashes she could see so plainly the failure of this purring little person to mean anything more in these bachelor rooms than one of its heads, and not half as much as the model of the *Galatea*. In his loneliness Pelham had cried out, "Horse, horse, play with me," and she had come trotting up. That was all. All the same it was obviously necessary to get her out before Pelham made his appearance, and how was that to be worked? Beatrix was too proud to show her eagerness to see him by going into his bedroom, where he was apparently changing for dinner, and if the truth must be told, too shy.

Still without any details as to the rift because Pelham had edged away from all her questions, May guessed that Beatrix had come now to make up the quarrel and conduct her husband back to the cottage in triumph. That he adored the grey-blue girl and pined for a sight of his boy had never been made more certain than that afternoon when she had found him sitting in an attitude of the most frightful despondency, with homesickness stamped upon his face, and

had rashly tried to fire him with a carnal spark, and seen him freeze. But for him to be removed from his rooms at this time would mean the ruination of what she called her brilliant scheme for the insurance of a soft future, and therefore, somehow or other, Beatrix must be "shocked out, quick."

It would have been very much more exciting to Malcolm, — but that he hated excitement, — if he had understood that Beatrix and the Beamish were measuring wits to achieve the same result. He didn't even wait for the verbal match. He was far too anxious. He murmured an excuse and left the room to go and talk to Pel.

And this brought a glint of anger into May's wide blue eyes because she regarded it as an unsporting trick.

There was silence in that long high room for a moment, — that hated room in which Pelham had paced up and down until the small hours of every morning cursing his age and his blundering and the disaster brought about by them both, telling himself that in spite of all Malcolm's urgings he was right in his decision to let Beatrix out of the mistake that she had made, though he longed for her and the boy with such an agony of longing that he could hardly bear to live. And during this silence, which was all broken by the incessant clamor of the street, Beatrix made a sudden decision not to finesse with the woman who pretended to be in possession, but, as time meant everything, to bring the whole thing to an abrupt point in icy Anglo-Saxon.

And so she went over to the sofa and looking squarely at our wee friend May, with her yards of open-work stockings, said "Look here, I know your

game and the fact that you're here this evening is a pretty certain proof that you haven't pulled it off. You never will and you're simply wasting time."

"You think so?"

"I know it. Now, Mrs. Beamish, I want if possible to avoid a scene. I want to have this place to myself without calling in the Jap to put you out. Will you do me the favor to get up and go, or must I ring the bell and give orders for you to be conducted to the elevator by a man who is probably an excellent exponent of jiu-jitsu?"

May laughed, a really most musical ripple. "A primeval person under your stucco, it seems," she said, settling into the sofa like a hen in warm earth.

"That's true," said Beatrix, "so I think you'll be wise to let this little episode end with dignity."

"You amuse me," said May.

"Then we'll both be amused. That's fair," and discovering the bell Beatrix went for it quietly, but with the autocracy of all her early training surging in her blood, and pressed it hard.

May sprang to her feet. "If you dare . . ."

And stopped because, followed by Malcolm, Pelham marched quickly into the room and clapped a sort of gag into her mouth by what she described to herself as a brother-in-law expression.

Going straight to Beatrix with outstretched hand and a smile that was half-affectionate and half-jocular he said, "Hullo, how are you? What are *you* doing in town?" and he threw the word "taxi" to the oily little man who had answered the bell.

Then, without waiting for an answer from the girl whose breath had been completely taken away, he went on in the same brisk, familiar tone. "Awful sorry

to hear about the collision. Tricky business getting about the streets these days. I'm dining with May and as we're going on to a show that begins rather early I'm afraid we shall have to make a dash for it, but if you'd care to wait here while Malcolm telephones to the garage for your car, do, by all means."

He picked up May's cloak, put it round her and gave the wordless and stupefied Beatrix, to whom he seemed to be an unrecognizable person, another and an even more perfect brother-in-law smile. "I don't want to hurry you, May," he added, and going to the door clapped Malcolm on the back.

It was one of the exquisite moments of May's checkered career. Chucked out, eh? Taken by the elbow by a black-haired expert and flung into an elevator, eh? Ye gods, it was gorgeous! Her chuckle was malignant and triumphant enough to bring a flicker into the glassy eyes of all those heads. "Well, so long," she said, waving her hand. "Hope you'll have no skids on the way home. Righto, Pel, I'm with you," and away they went together, seeing life like a second lieutenant from a Texas camp and a girl from a one-eyed town.

And when the bang of the door echoed through those rooms like a sort of parting shot Malcolm turned to Beatrix. "It can't be mended," he said, "it can't."

But if he expected to see a broken girl beaten to her knees he was hopelessly disappointed. He saw a pale girl, certainly, a girl who might have been through another near go in her car, but one who was without fear or the faint suggestion of cowardice. "I deserved that smack in the face because it's all my fault," she said. "But it *can* be mended and it *shall* be mended.

It shall! . . . Ring up the garage, Mally dear. I must go home at once to his boy."

V

AT twelve o'clock the following morning, — blue sky, friendly sun, air purged of all humidity by yesterday's storm — the wren-like Mrs. Beamish was deposited at the new entrance of the Plaza by Elizabeth McKenzie's patient and hard-working car. Charmingly and simply dressed, looking too young and pretty and soft to be out alone in a sinister world, there was all about her a new energy which made her heels rap, a new purpose, a new blaze of ambition. Crossing the wide pavement to the short flight of stone steps she ran up to the open door and went in to the nice foyer of the hotel which gives dignity and beauty to that corner of New York upon which some artistic hand has laid a European touch.

She was, of course, late for the appointment that she had made over the telephone some hours earlier with the man whose name she bore. Not very late. Twenty minutes perhaps, which didn't seem to her to be late at all. In the old days, those very old days before the war, she had been known to keep that patient man kicking his heels for very much longer than that. Why be a woman, and a pretty woman, and a wife?

The fact that Valentine Beamish did not rise slowly, like a long-legged bird, from one of the damask chairs was no proof that he had not arrived. It meant simply

that he had strolled off to the book stall, to kill time by looking at the bright covers of a hundred magazines, or gaze, with probable pity, at the large collection of novels which stood in eager competition waiting for a friendly hand. There are few sights more pathetic to anyone with sympathy than a jumble of brain children vying with each other, mostly vainly, to be bought and taken home. Except, perhaps, the lost dogs in their little cages, leaping at their wires at the sound of approaching steps.

And so, in full confidence, May left the not yet crowded foyer and plunged into the maze which might just as easily lead her into the fly-catcher parlor of a firm of Stock Exchange spiders, a dressmaker's shop already displaying autumn frocks and winter furs, — as though time didn't move fast enough without being pushed, — or a staircase leading into the bowels of the building, as to the old foyer where isolated girls with septuagenarian eyes and dead white noses were waiting to be fed by any courageous passer-by. And there, with his whimsical smile, stood the ex-flying man, patiently, in spats.

He said, "Good morning. How well you look," with that rigid lack of enthusiasm which goes with British courtesy.

But she was too deeply concentrated upon the purpose of that meeting to go off on a greeting tangent. "Find a quiet corner where we can sit and talk," she said. "I've got important things to say."

"Why shouldn't we kill two birds with one stone and talk while we have lunch?"

"No. I've only just had breakfast."

"Oh, well then, let's explore. I don't know the geography of this excellent pub but it ought to be easy

to find a quiet perch." And he led the way with long slow strides and finding, immediately, the place where people crowd for tea and try to talk above the band, waved his hand towards its range of emptiness with a Columbus smile, wondering what on earth was to be sprung upon him now. Remarkable little person, this May, who, if his former knowledge of her character held true, did not require his presence for any but a purely selfish reason. He hoped against hope that she was not about to suggest the outward continuance of their matrimonial adventure.

Spotting a place beneath the leafy screen behind which the orchestra had not yet collected to twist the nerves with jazz, May went for it energetically, sat, took a cigarette from her watered silk case upon which was stamped the Beamish crest, and was smoking with evident relish before her husband had followed her up. That impatient method of anticipating his services had always formed one of his grievances.

"Now," she said, coming to business with the alacrity of a man who is about to do his friend the favor of letting him in on the ground floor of a rotten concern, "when we dined together the other night we skirted the question of how we are going to tackle the future, didn't we?"

"We did," said Beamish. "The past and the present, under the circumstances, appeared naturally to be as far as we could go then, I thought."

"Always the little gentleman," said May, with a flash of teeth. "I don't know how it is with you, but with me, since then, things have begun to shape themselves, so let's waive the Grandison manner and come down to cases. Does that suit *you*?"

"Perfectly." Good God, what had she elaborated in the back of that dynamic mind?

"You resented my first idea that you had come over to live on me, for which I apologized, and I took it from that that you would be prepared to do the decent thing and let me out if I asked you to do so."

"Of course," he said, with the most intense relief.

"You won't want me to explain why, I know, — you hate personalities, don't you? — and as I don't want to mention names, or go into any details, I'll merely tell you this. The chance has come for me, if I work it right, to get married to a man who has all the money I need to allow me to indulge in my pet hobbies for the first time in my life."

"Congratulations," said Beamish.

"Thanks, but they're a little previous because I've all the way to go. And, moreover, I shall never be able to get there at all unless you will fall in with my plan of action."

"Command me," he said, fully aware of the fact that she was taking so long to come to her point because it was required of him to do something that must go against the grain.

She lit another cigarette, and being one who smoked from a sense of need and not to achieve a rakish air, inhaled deeply. Then she leaned a little forward and laid her small hand on his knee; and then, of course, it came.

"It won't do for me to divorce you, Val," she said, "in the way it's generally done."

"I'm afraid I don't understand. That's the only way."

Damn! The man's feet were stuck deep in the old traditions, despite the war which had blown them

nearly all sky high. "There isn't an only way," she whipped in. "There are two ways to everything, and I'm obliged to take the other one. That is, I want to *be* divorced."

"It couldn't be done," he said.

Wonderful! For the quality of resisting any change of form commend her to Valentine Beamish. Therefore she must be patient and wriggle in through a chink in his armor. "I'm in a very difficult and delicate position, if the truth must be told," she said, leading up to a lie. "You may find it difficult to believe but I'm in love, madly in love. The man, very much like you, dear Val, is married, and also like you insists on being divorced. He wants, of course, to achieve that end by going through the whole nasty business in the cold-blooded manner that is demanded under the law. But that's where I come in. I refuse to allow him to besmirch himself by any such humiliating and degrading method. The only way out, then, is to do the thing honestly, with me as the eventual co-respondent, — for us to be 'caught' together. Do you see? He will then be divorced by his wife, I shall be divorced by you, and he and I can make a home together to the sound of wedding bells." She didn't add to her touching picture any lines that might suggest the fact that only by arranging to be caught, as she so graphically called it, could she hope to become the second Mrs. Franklin. She banked on Pel's doing the honorable thing, as well she might, especially as her diabolical plan was to make him believe that it was her brutal husband who had had her watched. After all, wasn't it her helpful desire to relieve Pelham's loneliness that would place her in a compromising position? Of course it was.

And then she gathered up her things and rose to her tiny feet and held out her small but capable hand. Obviously there was nothing more to be said.

And Beamish, towering above her, held her hand, wordless. She had found the chink in his armor by her appeal to him to permit the thing to be done honestly, for love.

“Thank you,” she said.

“What do you want me to do?”

“Nothing. Leave it all to me.”

“But . . .”

“No. This is my affair. I will choose a lawyer for you and give him the necessary instructions. The rest is easy now. Goodbye, and a thousand thanks and the very best of luck.”

The rest was, as she had said, perfectly easy, because she knew the ropes, and knew Pelham, and had complete confidence in herself.

And there stood Beamish, alone in that empty space, but for the one-by-one arrival of the members of the band behind the screen of green stuff, and the cottage at Mount Vernon took much more definite shape.

Outside, — blue sky, friendly sun, air purged of all humidity by yesterday's storm, — our wee friend May took her smile into an eager yellow taxi to consult the lawyer of her husband's choice.

PART VIII

I

'ARRY 'ARRIS stood under the tall man upon whose discarded top boots he had been wont to lavish unlimited elbow grease, heart-breaking comic songs and all the hero-worship of a romantic nature. "Guv'nor," he said, earnestly, "you must let me out of this 'ere. I can't go through with it, reely I can't. I'm a bundle o' nerves."

Beamish was equally earnest. "My dear 'Arry, sooner or later you've got to live up to your present position as partner in the firm of Beamish & 'Arris and I ask you to make a stab at it to-night."

The combination of names, and all that they stood for, acted momentarily as a stimulant and flushed the veins of the gallant little cockney with a brief confidence. But when he threw a furtive glance over his shoulder and saw women in evening clothes and men in dinner jackets seated at the tables in the large circular restaurant whose roof was the sky the needle began to sew a new pattern of funk in his solar plexus.

"If we was goin' to 'ave a bite alone," he went on, "I could do it and enjoy meself, and throw out me chest. But I've never sat at the same table with a lidy and s'welp me it's arstin' too much, Guv'nor. I've got to be broke into it by easy stages. So, if it's all the sime ter you I'll nip off, peck a few seeds at one of them 'elp-yer-selves, and bring 'Enery round to drive you 'ome. 'Ow's that?"

“A wash-out,” said Beamish, unrelentingly. “Miss Magee has asked to meet you and there’s nothing more to be said. Put your tie straight, stand proudly on your hind legs and bear in mind that you’re my friend as well as my partner.”

And so, with a tragic gesture of despair which would have won a roar of gorgeous laughter if he had been playing his part before a theatre audience, 'Arry clicked his heels and edged his way to the looking glass in the foyer of the Italian restaurant. With the nervous fingers which had been scrubbed until the skin was sore, he arranged the borrowed microbe tie and did his best to glue down the recalcitrant feather at the back of his bullet head. And when he looked at the reflection of the immaculate Beamish and at his own stubby figure in the cheapest reach-me-downs he could have wept at the positive horror of this occasion, as well as at the blind trust and what seemed to him to be the almost divine friendship of the man for whom he possessed a dog-like love. All right then, he would put himself through it. He would pull his gorbliney weight. It wasn't the first time, by a long chalk, that he had obeyed the Major's orders in the face of death. And at that moment death seemed child's play to the certainty that he was going to eat with his knife, make gurgling noises with his soup and outrage a lady who couldn't be expected to understand all that had gone to build up the faithful relationship that existed between himself and “Good old Greyhound.”

It so happened that one of those nice episodes which make life well worth living had been the means of introducing Beamish to Tocciano's the night before. He had relieved 'Arry at six o'clock, taken the uncomplaining Ford along several streets with all the entice-

ment possible, and, after about three quarters of an hour of emptiness, had been hailed by a breezy person in upper Broadway and told to drive to the Harvard Club. During one of the hold-ups on the way down he had turned to give his customer a box of matches and been startled to receive a sudden order to "take this ruddy flivver to the nearest landing place and stop."

He did so, at a spot between two picture theatres, — one of the very few such spots.

"Get out," was the next command.

And he got out.

"Put it there."

And he put it there, looking into the excited and even emotional eyes of the man whose Arrow-collar face awoke no memories. The crunching of his hand brought the tears to his own eyes.

"Say, 'who the hell are you,' go on, say it."

And he said it. Damn it, he was only a taxi-driver.

"Don't you remember that silly ass Dowling, Stafford E. Dowling, who was pushed into your squadron away back in 1917 and was on the mat to you for smashing up two busses before the end of his first week?"

"No," said Beamish. That was an everyday affair.

"Don't you remember giving a dinner to a pie-eyed flying man the night before he received orders to join the first contingent of the A.E.F. . . ."

That was enough. Smoke, speeches, whiskey, loud and prolonged cheers, a sense of electrical confidence at the actual entrance of America. . . .

"My dear chap, how are you," said Beamish, putting it there again. A burst of questions and answers, of laughter and friendly thumps, ended in a quick

adjournment to Dowling's pet eating place where it was cool and there wasn't a band.

Beamish, that damn great soldier, that long cool fish who had had his nerve under the most complete control under all circumstances, that kind, stern beggar for whom, at a word, men had gone to certain extinction, — a taxi-driver! God!

The night's business was ruined, of course, until the theatres began to empty, but something was said that might very well lead to the dissolution of Messrs. Beamish & 'Arris, take Beamish into the old established real estate office of Stafford E. Dowling & Co. on a good salary and commission, and leave 'Arris in sole control of Henry Ford. "Why, with your personality and whimsical smile, to say nothing of spats, you were born for real estate," said Dowling. "Come on round in the morning and fix the whole thing up." And that morning, thankful to God for this lucky accident, Beamish had gone round, talked the whole thing over, accepted the management of the country branch which meant driving people to summer houses in a most seductive mood, and walked out to find himself in a position to ask Carol Magee to look for a little house in Westchester against the day of his release. He intended to make a handsome present of the Ford to 'Arry 'Arris before they went to sleep that night. He was pretty certain that it wouldn't be accepted, and that 'Arry would follow him wherever he went to earn the run of his teeth and his pillow and blanket by driving the car, and cleaning the house, and mending the socks, and looking after the chickens, and if there were enough space between the cottage and its homogeneous neighbours to afford a kitchen

garden in growing potatoes and radishes and the succulent weed. All the same he would make the offer.

"I forgot to tell you," he said, "that Miss Magee served as a nurse in a British hospital all through the war, old man."

"Oh, one of us," said 'Arry, with enormous relief. "That makes things a bit easier all right! She'll 'ave met my sort before. Good old!"

And when Carol came in, quite as excited as they were if they had only known it, she received a royal welcome from both these men, especially from the ex-Tommy who, after giving an exact imitation of the Major's bow, drew back, clicked heels, and flung up a vibrating hand to the back of his right ear.

Dear God, what pictures came back into her mind of those old days and nights behind the lines in France! It was just such a born comedian as 'Arry 'Arris who, riddled with machine gun bullets and without a dog's chance of pulling through, had turned a twinkling eye to the nearest stretcher bearer and said, "Home, James," with what he thought was the accent of a Duke.

It was a good evening. Their table was near, but not too near, the fountain in the middle of that huge open space whose pillars, bearing a gallery, were covered with ivy and which might have been as far away from New York as Switzerland, or even Italy, but for the fact that it was without an orchestra of black haired enthusiasts who went from Puccini to Debussy, from the popular airs of the old comic operas to the catchy tunes of "Ta Bouche." It was a good place, especially on a hot night. It had atmosphere. It gave those whose hearts had gone to Europe, to the old places, but whose bodies had remained at the grind-

stone, a sense of being abroad, of having escaped. The waiters were Italian. Explosions of Italian took place, like operatic recitative, every time there was a smash. There were foreign voices all about and foreign laughter. French people and Russians, men and women who had fled from peace-ridden Europe, famine, disease, and falling exchanges, to find an Eldorado, gesticulated and jabbered. They laughed, and did themselves well. What did they care? They had suffered their quota. Now for a good time, — while it lasted. And here they sat until almost every one had left and 'Arry was obliged to tear himself away from a thousand reminiscences to take his flivver to an order.

“And now I must go,” said Carol, who had been laughing to the verge of tears all through dinner. Her host and his friend were not in uniform it was true, nor was she back in her nurse's dress, but it seemed certain to her that instead of finding herself in a street in New York, gleaming with the eye-cutting electric lights of several theatres, she would be among the débris of a mutilated village in France through which there would pass a line of A.S.C. motor trucks, or the glassy-eyed remains of a regiment relieved from the trenches. . . . How soon would history repeat itself?

They walked slowly towards Fifth Avenue, cringing beneath the shatter of a train that passed along the overhead railway. It might have been one of the air-raids of which they had just been speaking.

The Greyhound put his hand under Carol's elbow to guide her across the street, and kept it there. The pent-up words of all those years were on the tip of his tongue. But she hardly knew him from Adam, any

of the numerous Adams who had been so grateful for her smile. All the same he was a man with a good job and a good friend behind him, by way of a change, and it was not to be long before May had set him free. And so he permitted himself just this. "I'm afraid our luncheon parties must come to an end, Bluebird," he began.

It had been so good to wake up every morning with the knowledge that she no longer went in and out with the tide like a scrap of isolated flotsam.

"Oh, why?" There was a great disappointment in her voice.

His fingers closed upon her arm. "A pal of mine called Dowling is sendin' me out of town to run his real estate show. I'm resignin' from the taxi business to-night. But, if it's all the same to you, I'd like to dash up and take you out to dinner every night. Do you mind?"

She made a sound that was not quite a laugh. "Mind? You have a funny way of putting things. But, of course, you can't come in every night for that. Why should you?"

"Because," he said, seizing the unexpected chance to put himself fairly and squarely before her, — "I'm in this country simply to do two things, — to see as much of you as I can in the hope that when you get used to me you will like me enough not to get married to anyone else, and to work like a steam-roller so that I may be able to ask you to consider the possibility of sharing a house as jolly as the one your sister lives in."

He waited for a comment, an exclamation, an incredulous laugh, but nothing came, because, if he had only been imaginative enough to guess it, this lonely

girl was moved to too great an emotion by that simple definite statement, behind which her intuition enabled her to read the translation of a dream, to be able to speak. It came to her then, in a flash, that this one of her innumerable woundeds had taken her away in his heart when he had left her hospital, and that during all the following years of monotonous drudgery she had not been alone because every day she had been helped and inspired by the waves of sympathy and love that he had sent out to her. It gave a sudden explanation to many things that she had not been able to understand, — patience, faith, a vague expectation, kindness, a sense of being protected.

And so, greatly encouraged, he went a little farther. “You ought to know,” he said, “that I have also to wait until I am set free from a war marriage, and it will be a year, probably, before this can be brought about. During this time I want you to consider me as on probation, if you will let me have so long, Bluebird. Can you?”

“Yes,” she said, and gave him the old smile that he used to wait for as he lay on the hospital bed as a man waits for the sun.

II

POOR old Beamish, the optimist. In talking about his freedom as though it were one of the few certain things he drew on what little knowledge he had of May and her characteristic method of going for the thing that she had set her mind upon like a hound for

a fox. It once had suited her purpose to set her mind on him, he remembered. . . . He banked, therefore, on her carrying to a successful conclusion the plan which she had no more than outlined in the Plaza. It was only a matter of time. He would have been the one amazed man in New York if he had been told that, by an everyday coincidence, those two people whom he had driven to the apartment house in Forty-fourth Street, and might never see again, were the very ones who were going to try to throw a monkey wrench into May's machinery which would spoil her game. "It ain't always the ruddy Boche as mucks up our tea fights. Often as not it's one of our own young R.F.A. sportsmen out in O.P. who gives a short range to the guns. It's a funny world," as 'Arry 'Arris was wont to say in philosophic moments.

At half past two that afternoon, still suffering from the kick in the face that Pelham's masterly piece of acting had administered the day before, Malcolm threw down his pen in disgust, jammed on his hat, forgot to pay his usual attention to the tactless parrot, and went out. Work was impossible. Concentration as elusive as a tiny ball in a spiral of water. Even if he were to receive another snubbing he felt that he must see Pelham again at once. In all honesty, though with a certain amount of irritation, he was very willing to confess that he knew nothing about girls. In spite of Beatrix's flaming faith in Pel, however, he stuck to his point that he knew everything about man, and Pelham's amazing behaviour in treating Beatrix like a sister-in-law convinced him that his friend *was* revenging himself on life by playing the fool with Mrs. Beamish. That woman's confidence, impudence and malicious triumph must have been based on something. In

Pelham's state of mind he would have hurt himself in a similar way. He knew that. And there were other reasons. But why argue? Beatrix had brought about this beastly state of things and must pay the price; but surely to Heaven, as the friend of them both, he must make one more effort to patch the broken thread. He might find Pelham a little less rigid and unresilient if he went round now. The whole thing was a damned shame. They had married for love, these two, and Beatrix had rounded the corner and was ashamed of herself and supremely ready to make amends. And there was the boy. "Oh, God," he cried out, "don't let this be added to the appalling list of failures. Give me a clue, give me a clue. Help me to find some way to bring these two together again."

And with this prayer in his heart he presented himself to the uniformed door-keeper at the old apartment house. "Mr. Franklin has just gone out," he was told, and stood irresolute. What was the use? He was a blunderer. All along he had been a blunderer. Hadn't he been the meddling fool who had argued in favor of Pelham's taking a trip on the *Galatea*? Fatal, quite fatal. A priceless piece of idiocy. Why hadn't he left them alone to work it out? But he didn't turn away. In utter humbleness of spirit he had uttered his cry for help, and so help came. He stalked to the elevator, let himself into the apartment with his latch-key, and went toward the living room to wait for Pel. Memories seemed to rise and fly round his head like friendly pigeons. For five years they had shared these rooms, to leave them on the spur of a whim and come back with trophies. Like that little room in Carnegie Hall which vibrates with the emotion, ecstasy, fright, aspiration, triumph of all the musicians and conductors

who wait there before their turn comes, and return uplifted with applause, this place rang with the echoes of the laughter and free-heartedness of good old days. Every familiar thing in the hall, the sporting prints, the collection of sticks, the armoire made up of old altar pieces of village churches in France, the heavy brass bowls brought back from Moscow, the Goya etchings collected in London, Paris and the Hague, that lacquer tray picked up in China, the carved wood from the South Sea Islands, the Persian boxes glowing with color, the gourds from the West Coast of Africa, the silver gong from the bazaar at Lahore . . . all touched the notes of his memory like fingers on the keys of a piano. It was a tune of comradeship and freedom, irresponsible wanderings all over the map that was played as he stood there, the Beatrix theme recurring again and again, because all through those times, wherever he had been, Beatrix, Beatrix was in his heart.

But he drew up short at the half-open door of the living room. People were talking. A man with a hard resonant voice . . . and our wee friend May. He knew that ripple of laughter. Well, as that was the case, waiting was impossible. He would be shot rather than undergo that woman's gleeful impertinence again. What was being said, however, held him rooted.

"There's no need to worry about the slight irregularity in the proceedings," said May. "Major Beamish has left everything to me, and so I instruct you on his behalf."

"And you will be responsible. . . ."

"Oh, yes, I'll be responsible for the costs. That's definitely understood. Friday night then."

“All right. Friday night.” There was a guttural chuckle. “The detectives employed by your husband will enter this apartment with your latch-key at midnight. You will see to it that you are caught in a sufficiently compromising attitude, — in flagrante delicto, as we call it in law, — and the grounds of your husband’s action will be in my hands. Another scandal for the Vanderdykes!”

“I should think so! That’s exactly what I want. Friday night then, at twelve o’clock. . . .”

A chair was pushed back, and Malcolm, the unwilling but fortunate eavesdropper, found his feet again, crept back across the hall to the front door, opened and closed it with the velvet touch of a safe-breaker, and fled downstairs. If he were to wait for the elevator he might be caught.

Good God! So that was the game! With or without the connivance of her husband she was going to trick an action for divorce, with Pel as co-respondent, in the hope that this would be followed by an action by Beatrix against Pelham with herself as co-respondent and lead to her becoming, Pelham being the man he was, the second Mrs. Franklin. It was as plain as a pike-staff.

Well, what was to be done? To-day was Tuesday. There were only Wednesday and Thursday for action, quick, decisive action. Those people, between them, had the unsuspecting Pelham in a net, — always assuming that he were unsuspecting and not lending himself Quixotically to this method of setting Beatrix free. And this, after smashing up against a cul-de-sac of thought, Malcolm dismissed. Pelham, he knew, would go through the degrading business only in the regular lawful way.

Nevertheless the conversation that he had overheard between Mrs. Beamish and the shyster lawyer did provide him with a clue. Yes, it did. By showing Beatrix the way by which she could extricate Pelham from this revolting and cold-blooded trap — and how she would adore to rise to the occasion — he could put into her hands the means to a reconciliation, an explanation, a deep and true apology, and a coming together, unless, of course, Pelham stuck to his point, reiterated again and again, that the thread was broken, because there had been a mistake and he was too old. Such rot! Unselfishness could be carried as far as selfishness and work just as much harm. And the happy balance between the two could only be kept by — what? Humor? Certainly. It maintained the balance in everything else, — when it could be found.

Beatrix to a greater degree than anyone whom he had ever known, possessed this inestimable gift. All that was needed, he was convinced, was the right opportunity to apply it. And then up would go the flag of peace, and with all their niggling inhibitions left behind, after the great burst of mutual confession, the spring cleaning of two minds, these two would join hands again and get back to the precious path of give and take, less difficult to keep to because Beatrix was not, and never would be, one of the social sheep, a slave to the indefatigable futility which imitative women, without seriousness and with too much leisure and money, called Society. She would be glad and happy to kill her time with Pelham in the open, healthily, with games.

Barging into somebody on his way, head down, to his rooms, Malcolm looked up, with an apology on his lips, and saw Pelham. It was obvious that sleepless

nights, city streets, and home-sickness were beginning to tell on this man, unused to all these things. He had lost his tan, and was thin and drawn. He looked like a fish out of water, a hunter in the shafts of a cab, or, better still, a very wretched man, astonished to find that even he, to whom life had been a primrose path, was not immune from suffering, amazed to discover that all his chunks of money could purchase no better antidote for pain and disillusion and disappointment than the hard-earned dollar of the people who touched his elbow.

"I've just been round to your rooms," he said.

"Good Lord," said Malcolm, "I've just been round to yours."

"Everything goes wrong these days. A damned mess the whole thing's in!"

"Did you want me for any specific job?"

"No. I just wanted you."

"Same with me, old man. Which way shall we go?"

"Any old way. What's it matter?"

They were opposite Duttons, with its tempting windows. Into the great gully the afternoon sun was falling. Never ending traffic of machines and people poured this way and that, all organized, all competing, all in the monotonous daily struggle of self-preservation to the syncopated rhythm of New York's peculiar song. Uptown, downtown, East, West, it was all the same. Gullies, crowds, ant-like activity, shatter, the reek of oil, syncopation, self-preservation, but, praise be to God, sun.

"This way, then," said Malcolm, facing the wide round eye in the middle of the street that changed

from yellow to red, locking and releasing the wheeled barges that churned the great canal.

And so Pelham turned and went that way. What the hell did it matter?

"Can you pitch a few things in a bag and get out of this place with me?" asked Pelham abruptly.

"When?"

"To-day, now."

An hour before Malcolm would have jumped at the idea. Nothing on earth would have given him a satisfaction so profound as to leave that fiendish little person and her plotting lawyer flat on their backs in the middle of failure. Then, too, alone with Pelham somewhere, what arguments he could have brought out to explain, or endeavor to explain, the Beatrix kink that was at the bottom of all their trouble. The scrap of conversation that he had had the consummate luck to overhear had, however, made it urgently necessary to keep Pelham in the City over the infamous Friday night so that Beatrix should be able, in a manner yet to be planned, to prevent another scandal, turn the tables on our wee friend May, switch the white flame of faith on Pelham and earn her right to a declaration of undying love. No explanations of his, Malcolm had the sense to know, even if they were inspired by the angels, could bring these two into sanity again so quickly or so completely as by a dramatic method of rescue performed by Beatrix herself. And so he said, "Awfully sorry, old son. That's quite impossible."

"Why?"

"Well, you see . . ."

"No, I don't. What are you doing? You've always been able to get away before."

“Yes, I know.”

“Well then, what’s the idea?”

“I’ve let myself in for several engagements that’ll keep me till Saturday at the earliest.”

“What engagements?” *He* had never permitted engagements, or anything else, to stand in his way. For the life of him he couldn’t understand why another man should, — even Malcolm, who wrote to eke out an income that barely kept his head above water. It was funny.

“Well, if you must know, I’m going to drive out and dine with Beatrix this evening, spend the night and see the boy.” And this was true. He held the key, he thought, for her return to Paradise.

“Oh,” said Pelham, and dropped the whole thing like a red-hot cinder. But his face was flooded with an expression of the most exquisite pain as though some devil had taken hold of his heart with a pair of tweezers and twisted it round. Would to God that he were going to dine with Beatrix and spend the night and see the boy . . . and after five minutes’ silence, during which Malcolm eyed him sideways in the deepest sympathy, he summed up that most foolish and regrettable of temperamental muddles in his friend’s recurring phrase, “It’s a damned shame,” added “so long, then, give my love to the boy,” turned on his heel and went — where? What the hell did it matter?

III

Not on the terrace looking out on a peaceful sweep of undulating country with here and there a delicate

steeple rising to a cloudless sky, and not in Beatrix's favorite place in the rose garden under the last of the day's most generous sun, but, rightly enough, in Pelham's den with all its strong reminders of that simple man, with the door shut, and in a voice too low to be caught by the anxious but unscrupulous ear of the little brown woman who was fluttering about like a hen with a brood of ducks, Malcolm told his story. And while he spoke, painting a rapid picture of all that had occurred that lucky afternoon, helped as he had been to find a clue to the solution of this domestic cataclysm, he was strongly conscious of the fact that here was not any of the numerous Beatrices that he had known and loved, — the lonely, large-eyed child, watched and guarded like the only daughter of a Czar, old and wise before her time; the long-legged flapper, isolated behind the hedges of a grotesque up-bringing; the incurable débutante feeling her wings with all the pent-up curiosity of a released bird; the autocrat brought down by love as by an arrow, the young mother reacting to a second freedom and the backwash of an adolescence not yet fully spent, but a Beatrix who had set out deliberately against the sane, kind warnings of her better self, partly from a distorted sense of mischief, and a niggling desire for revenge, and partly to gratify the craving for romance that is deep in the nature of every girl to hurt the pride and sense of justice of an unimaginative man and had had her ears boxed, — a Beatrix healthy and humble, who had come out of all the tides and eddies of the shallow waters of youth into the depths of grown-up people to look honestly at her responsibility and make the most generous amends for her spring madness. It made him feel rather old, and all

the more eager to help. If he hadn't found this Beatrix, but one of the others in these various stages of evolution, he would have gone back immediately to Pelham, pitched a few things in a bag, and got out. She wouldn't have been worth the fight, lovely though she was. No girl is worth fighting for, however beautiful her body may be, if her mind is muddled and she insists on remaining among the category of fools. Not worth fighting for and not worth the space she occupies upon a crowded earth.

And when the story had been told, with no suggestion added as to how to turn the Beamish trap upon herself, — he was dealing with a brain more fertile than his own, — Malcolm dried up completely and lit his pipe. He, too, had learned his lesson, had proved himself a blunderer, and would interfere no more.

And after the blood had rushed to her forehead, and her nostrils had illustrated all the gamut of her feelings, Beatrix got up and walked about, as she always did when something had to be done. "Um," she said, "um," and touched things here and there, moved a chair away to make a freer path, straightened out a rut in the carpet with her foot, took deep breaths, and gave out enough vitality to make the room pulse as by the hidden engines of a ship. Once in a while she drew up short for a moment, with a wrinkle in her forehead, and when she re-commenced her fish-like movements round that bowl of a room Malcolm could see that she was looking through its walls, that she had gone in spirit to Pelham's apartment opposite the Plaza, and with a growing feeling of exhilaration was formulating a plan to confound and humiliate the tricky Mrs. Beamish and bring all her own power

of charm and newly-acquired honesty to bear upon the man who had taken her literally when she had been playing with symbols. Win or lose, regain or never recover, — it had come to that.

Finally she stopped, lit one of the cigarettes that Pel had kept there for her use — tobacco was good enough for him — and stood in front of the solemn man in goggles.

“Thanks most awfully, Mally,” she said. “You’ve given me my chance and I shall take it. You asked for help to-day and got it. I shall take a leaf out of your book from now until I bring Pel home, and please God I shall get it too. There’s nothing, just nothing in the whole of life that I want so much as to stand outside this room once more and listen to the sound of a pipe being knocked out on the ring on Pelham’s finger. I’ve missed it. . . . It’s almost seemed like death.” She permitted two tears to run all down her cheeks.

Malcolm held out his hand.

“We make our own Heaven and Hell,” she said, and that was all. This man had been almost her only playmate, her father confessor times without number. But some things are too sacred to confess, and among these were her lonely nights, her agonies of remorse, her self-inflicted whippings, her inarticulate cries to the man who was needed and adored and respected and liked and admired all the more for his leaving her flat. Sooner or later, poor little soul, she had had to take what was coming to her, and either rise with courage and begin anew or scoff at Life’s brutal indiscrimination and ask for it again.

And then she chose the most comfortable chair and

sat on her leg, but not before she had repaired the slight damage to her face with powder and lip-stick with all that deftness and astonishing lack of fourth-wall sense that goes with our self-respecting girls these days.

“Have you had a brain-wave?” asked Malcolm, fully expecting to be told that she had.

“No,” she said. “All I can see, so far, is that you must go back early to-morrow morning and move Heaven and earth to keep Pel from leaving town. For the rest I can see the vital necessity of my being hidden in his apartment on Friday night so that I may be able, in a wifely capacity, to be present at the very moment when May’s detectives break in. I can see, of course, the utter collapse of her diabolical scheme when I introduce myself as Mrs. Franklin, and her as the friend of the family. Your imagination is vivid enough to paint a perfect picture of the rout of the detectives and the whipped dog exit of our wee friend May, with the one or two things that I hope I shall be inspired to say ringing in her ears. After that, Pelham and I . . . But what I *can’t* see is what worries me, Mally.”

“What’s that?” he asked, leaning forward.

“The base on which all these things must be built, — how to get into the apartment. That’s the difficulty. You have your key, I know. The doorman, and the man who works the elevator, can be bribed to hold their tongues. That goes without saying. And so can the Jap. But suppose Pel brings May back directly after dinner, as she will probably see that he does, — there is the great risk of my being caught by her. She has given herself the run of the house, you remember. I shan’t, of course, dare to hide in Pelham’s

bedroom for that reason, and if I lock myself in the room you used to have and she finds it locked her suspicions will be aroused at once. . . . It isn't as easy as it looks, old boy."

It was Malcolm's turn to walk about. The grim humor of trying to find a way by which a wife could break into her husband's rooms in order to save him from being caught in what the law called *flagrante delicto* with a purring little woman who wanted a divorce made no appeal. On the contrary. He hated the thing, and held in contempt the whole process of what was called law which made any such proceeding possible to arrange. Nevertheless, there it was. They lived in a period of high civilization and astounding progress. Everybody knew that. The papers said so every day. Therefore it must be true. And any man who disagreed was old-fashioned, reactionary, moss-covered. Besides, argument was abortive. Beatrix had played into the hands of Mrs. Beamish and her lawyer, and although the dice were loaded the game must be seen through to the end. Tricks were the order of the day.

"I don't know what to suggest," he said, finally. "My brain refuses to work."

Not so Beatrix. "Do you happen to know who lives in the apartments above or below the one that Pelham has?"

"Ah, that's an idea," he said, stopping short.

"I should think it is," said Beatrix, after it as though it were a rabbit. "Do you?"

"I know the man above, — Gifford Bartlett, Wall Street. An excellent chap. A friend of mine for years."

"Is he living there now?"

“I suppose so. I saw him at the club the other day. . . . Wait a second. I believe he said that he was spending the summer at Huntington. I can easily find out.”

“Find out. Is there a fire escape at the back of the house?”

“Yes.”

“Then rent his apartment to-morrow, move in, and ask me to dinner on Friday night.” She sprang to her feet and did a war dance, with her eyes alight with excitement. And then she pounced on the poor old poet, the impractical man of rhymes. “The telephone, quick,” she cried. “Huntington. Scour Huntington. Offer Gifford Bartlett the earth and the sun and the moon, and don’t come back until you’ve got his fire escape. Run — rush! This is my only hope.”

And out into the hall went Malcolm, the little brown woman scuttling out of his way, — her ear had been glued to the keyhole — and as Beatrix heard him asking for “Huntington — Information,” she went down on her knees on the bear’s skin.

IV

AND after dinner, as soon as Beatrix had departed from hints and told Mrs. Keene in the fewest number of unmistakable words that she would be better far in bed, there was another council of war. This time under the stars.

“Out of range of the house,” said Beatrix as she led her old and tried friend to the woods, — down the

long slope of lawn, across the bridge over a ceaselessly chattering stream, and through a rock garden in which plants that might have come out of the drawings of Doré flourished on a modicum of earth.

“Why? Has anything got about?”

He didn't quite know whether to congratulate himself upon earning her laugh or not. He was rather afraid not.

“My dear old Mally, where have you been all your life? Don't you know that the world is peopled with creatures who scent a failure a mile off and are never so happy as when they can spread the glad tidings of disaster? Since the morning after Pel drove away all the house has been buzzing. A row on the great day. A sudden disappearance during the night of the great day. What food for the carrier pigeons! My cook to Mrs. Whatshername's cook. Mrs. Whatshername's cook to Mrs. Whatshername and Mrs. Whatshername to the country club, and from the country club . . .” She threw out her arms to North and South. “Scandal! Hurrah, — another scandal! The Franklins have quarrelled. How splendid! Didn't I always say that they seemed to be too much in love? Didn't I tell you as soon as they came back from the honeymoon that things looked too good to be true? It couldn't last, of course it couldn't last. You know that girl. You remember all that talk about her wild doings just after she came out? That artist, the family flutter, the secret marriage story? How wonderful! She's broken loose again. Young Greenwood was at the house. She went off in his car. Franklin flew at his throat, and rattled the teeth in his head, and then turned on his wife and beat her, and served her jolly well right. Gather round, gather round, drink in the

glorious news. Another unhappy marriage. What fun! A divorce for the front page of the papers. How lovely! The Vanderdykes, the Franklins, Greenwood, the ex-flying man, and an English woman of title or something. Oh, yes, they've got her too!"

"Good Lord!" said Malcolm.

"And you, — you've not been left alone, old boy, don't think it."

"I? But where do I come in?" Poor devil, he was only Charles his friend.

"Haven't you been down to see me, — once, twice? May not Mrs. Whatsername's niece have seen us driving together in town, and her brother have spotted us going into your rooms from the steps of the City Club that rainy afternoon? A snowball, a skyscraper, a mountain! Wiz-wiz-wiz in the kitchen, wiz-wiz-wiz at the bridge table, wiz-wiz-wiz on the eighteenth green, wiz-wiz-wiz on the train, and finally, how gleefully and how lusciously the wiz-wiz-wiz in 'Town Tattle'."

"No."

"Why do you say no? Hasn't that poisonous little garbage collector a flight of carrion crows who live on broken hearts and broken vows and triumph on wretchedness?"

"Oh, damn those blackmailing devils!" he cried out.

"You can't," she said. "They have a place in the world. They satisfy the appetite that everybody has for other people's troubles. These nasty little unhappiness gatherers with their itching fingers and long lascivious ears supply an every-week want. It is so comforting to read of other people's failures when one has failed oneself."

The dead leaves of last winter crinkled under their

feet, and the moonlight came through the still living leaves and made shimmering pools of silver. Ah, the clean air, the quietude, the beauty, and the sense of God.

And suddenly, out there under the fittest foliage of a dream, she put her young golden head on the shoulder of that faithful man and cried and cried like a child. Her barrier of courage gave way for a moment, and all her pent-up tears came rushing out. She was very young, and the unexplainable passion, unfulfillment, urgency — what was it? — had bounced back at her, and left a lasting hurt. But her tears were not those of self-pity. She didn't belong to the martyr type. They were of shame, of untranslatable regret for having given days and nights of suffering to the man who was her man, of something like terror at the careless waste of happiness in a life where winter follows on the heels of spring at such a frightful pace, and in which the most frequent word is failure. Failure because the high aim is left untaught.

And as to this counter-move, the plans for which looked very good on paper, thanks to the kindness of Gifford Bartlett who had lent his apartment to Malcolm for a month and telephoned instructions to that effect to the manager of the building, who could tell whether it would end in failure even if May were routed and her trick turned into a damp squib? At the end of it stood Pelham, humiliated as no man has a right to be, and who had been turned down, kept off, refused, who accepted the fact that the thin thread had been broken, and who had said over and over again that the whole thing was a mistake because he was too old.

It came to Malcolm, out there under the trees in that quiet place, excitement having simmered down,

just as it came to Beatrix in that moment of weakness, her courage melting into tears, that the word failure might have been written already, inerasably, on the board at the end of the road. Let a girl hurt the pride of a man and his sense of fairness by manufacturing an excuse to withhold herself from him and however deep in love he may be the foundations of marriage give way and the whole thing comes down with a crash. . . . Doubts and fears flew under those trees like bats while Beatrix cried and Malcolm tried to comfort. But the white flame of her faith in Pelham never went dull for an instant, which was so wonderful to Malcolm, who knew himself and men. It rivalled the white light of the moon during all the incoherent outpouring of her shame, regret, and love, and terror, and he could see in her utter lack of jealousy in which he could hardly believe, knowing May and realizing her Eve-like attraction, not conceit, not egotism, but a belief that made him tremble. A man spoils his nose to spite his face and takes his revenge upon himself. What then? . . . It was a damned shame.

And so it was not with confidence that they said good night at last, those two, the wife and the friend. "But I shall go through with it," said Beatrix, "it's my only chance. And you will stand by me again, old Mally, won't you, as you have always done, little as I've ever done for you?"

"But I love you, my dear," he answered, "and in having that to hold to you've done everything for me."

What could she do, in thanking such a man, but take up his faithful hand and put it to her lips?

V

BACK in the city the following morning, having arranged to give Beatrix dinner in Bartlett's rooms on Friday night, the first of the many things that Malcolm had to do was to see Pelham. He must be kept in town, otherwise the scheme, difficult enough to carry out, would go phut. And so, feeling like a secret-service man for the first time in his peculiarly above-board life, or the first secretary of an Embassy who was gifted to say one thing and mean another and smile and smile, Malcolm went straight to the bachelor apartment in which he had been wont to hang his hat. He was, it was perfectly obvious, excited. This was, as Beatrix had said, the last chance, and as he was bound to consider it, after his several talks with Pel, a forlorn hope. A quiet man, who delighted in backwaters, and who went for idealism as a bee for honey, it must be confessed that the unusual drama in this situation thrilled him. He was up on his toes that morning, with his shoulders squared, his glasses polished, and with a feeling in his backbone that had not been there since the hour that America had thrown in her lot with the Allies. It was his job to help to save this marriage, to make up to Beatrix and Pelham for his well-meaning but blundering interference, and to have a hand in blowing up the indescribably nasty game of the Beamish woman, to whom, kind as he was, he had taken a tremendous dislike. In other

words, loathed like the devil. There is nothing like frankness.

It was ten o'clock when he sprang from a taxi. He didn't notice Pelham's car that was waiting at the curb, and he was just about to make a dash for the house, after paying the criminal who had driven him from the Grand Central, when a high, warm voice called out, "Morning, Malcolm," and turned him round on his heel.

Damn, — it was the Beamish, charmingly dressed in country clothes, with a Mistress smile on her water color face and a sarcastic hand stretched out. "Pel needs exercise," she said domestically, "so I'm taking him out to play golf. Merry and bright to-day?"

He stammered something, he didn't know what, feeling a fool, and most conscious of the fact that jealousy and resentment were stamped on his forehead, and backed into Pelham, who came out with his clubs.

"Oh, hullo. You're just in time to come along with us, old boy. No arguments. Nip in and we'll drive you round to your place to change. Gorgeous day for beating the ball."

May's two's company signals fell hopelessly flat.

An almost feminine desire to spoil the day for this possessive woman, as he knew that he could, surged over Malcolm. Whatever she might have become to Pelham she wouldn't have a look-in by the time he'd finished with the day. But there was his job, and no time to waste. "I'd love it," he said, "but I can't. How about to-morrow?"

"Full up," said Pelham, whose Friday had been mapped out for him, and went to the car. Extraordinary thing, the change that had come over Malcolm.

In the old days he had had no "can'ts" to bring up. Life had become all cock-eyed, it seemed.

And did May miss the chance to appear gracious to Pel and get one in as it was perfectly safe? Not she. "Too sorry," she said. "A threesome would have been awfully jolly. Well, another time, old thing. So long."

And away went the car, with Pelham as sulky as a school boy being dragged off by a governess.

Well, it was good to know that he was to be kept in leash over the fateful Friday, and that there was no work to do about that. But what, in Heaven's name, was the use of making women on the Beamish mold and letting them play havoc in an already difficult world? Very careless work. And it occurred to Malcolm as he watched the disappearing Packard that life would be much easier and more delightful if only those women who stood well on the books of the recording angel were allowed to have babies. He was in a greatly disturbed mood that morning.

The manager of the building had been a German before and during the war, but when America went in he blushed out as an enthusiastic Dutchman, hanging the portrait of Queen Wilhelmina in his office over that of the All-Highest. Since the Armistice he had wobbled from one side of the border to the other, according to the opinion expressed by the public at his favorite moving picture theatre, but, at the moment, was truculently German because of the popular belief that France was emulating Shylock in her dogged intention to take her pound of flesh — to which, of course, she had every possible right, and would have to cut with the bayonet. And so the Queen's round face was turned to the wall and over the picture of the

ex-All-Highest had been pasted a very German drawing of a reluctant Wagner being conducted to a Reinhardt Heaven by a bevy of over-fed angels in Jaeger underwear.

Malcolm found him sitting in his shirt sleeves beneath this disconcerting composition, when he went in to ask for Bartlett's key. "I shall probably only use these rooms over the week-end," he said, "and I want it to be distinctly understood that nothing is to be mentioned about my being there to anybody in the building." And he added immediately, because of the unpleasant grin which spread itself all over the ample Teutonic face, "I have some important work to finish and I don't want to be disturbed, — even by Mr. Franklin."

"I do not tink Mr. Franklin has time to disturb joost now," he got in answer, with a rolling of nitrate eyes. Wiz-wiz-wiz on the door-step, wiz-wiz-wiz in the elevator, wiz-wiz-wiz in the office. If May wanted witnesses for the case that she had in hand there were several of them here!

Bartlett was a thoroughly sound fellow, an excellent stock broker, and a golfer difficult to beat, but he had never shaken off the habit of so many imitative men of advertising his bachelorhood by plastering his rooms with nudes. The hall, the dining and sitting room and both bedrooms had nothing else to show. The effect was defeating, annoying and silly, like the chorus of the Folies Bergères after the first five minutes. It made one long for prints of Queen Elizabeth, and Early Victorian maidens in hoops and pantalettes. It was as small-town as a woman is who wears a million dollar string of pearls at breakfast or goes in

bathing in all her diamond rings. It made misogynists of fastidious men.

But the fire escape did run down the back of the building and nothing would be easier than for Beatrix to go down one flight of iron stairs to the window of Malcolm's old room in Pelham's apartment. So that was all right. And when Malcolm telephoned to Beatrix to say so, as he had promised to do, he used the mysterious language of the boot-legger in case anyone should be listening-in.

To which he got "I don't understand one word of it, Mally. I hate codes and picture puzzles and card tricks, you know that. I must have it in full with every i dotted and every t crossed, please."

And so, laying aside his newly acquired secret service manner, he gave it in full. But when he said that Pelham was safe over Friday and hoped that that would be enough, because he didn't want to describe the little scene outside the house, he was asked how he knew and described it. How, how, how, — to everything how. Every minute detail was demanded, even as to what our wee friend May was wearing. And then he boggled. A round hat with a feather was as far as he could go, which, he agreed, was rather an airy costume in which to play golf. Aunt Honoria was coming to spend two nights; Brownie, not daring to ask any direct questions, was sitting on a volcano, and the servants were going about wearing the expressions of people who expected to be ordered to put on their life belts at any moment. Yes, up to the present mother and father were accepting the explanation that Pelham was obliged to stay in town on urgent business. But Mrs. McKenzie had begun to hear

things and had just been on the 'phone. Wiz-wiz-wiz in the Colony Club.

"The Plaza at half past seven to-morrow, then, and please God we pull it off."

"Please God we do, my dear."

VI

BUT the best laid schemes o' mice and men . . .

At half past six on Friday afternoon, having just returned from spending the day with May, the appallingly unconscious Pelham went off at a tangent which blew everything sky-high. Bored to utter extinction, he went to the telephone, managed to procure Mrs. McKenzie's number after speaking to an irate Jewish gentleman in Brooklyn and an ex-Brigadier General of the Russian army who was peeling potatoes in a stuffy restaurant in the Fifties, and was answered by the Beamish, who had just risen glistening from her bath.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said, "but I'm afraid I must ask you to scratch dinner to-night, if you will . . ."

"Wh-at?"

"Yes, I know. It's a rotten nuisance and I'm frightfully sick about it, but as a matter of fact" — What on earth was he to say? — "something's gone wrong in the engine room of the *Galatea* and I've got to go along at once and see about it." It was a brain wave. "I'm desperately sorry, but I'm sure you'll understand, and if you will lunch with me to-morrow I'll tell you

exactly what's happened." And he rang off quickly, hoping she would assume that they had been cut off by an operator who objected to long conversations and was doing her best to revive the lost art of letter-writing. A worthy idea, and when, as he knew that it would, in the course of a few minutes, the bell began to ring and ring, he stood grinning at the instrument that ruins peace and smashes seclusion and let the damned thing ring. He was fed up. He could stand no more, not another second, of our wee friend May. He did not want ever to see her again, or listen to her constant prattle, or watch the changing expressions on her pretty baby face. He was through. Mafische. He was going to leave the receiver off, send the Jap away, chuck dinner, mix a three finger whiskey peg, and take a book to bed. If he were obliged to read he would, but if sleep were kind enough to come and put him as nearly out of that cock-eyed life as death, he would be the most grateful man among all the swarming millions in the City.

Which, as May announced to that nice bedroom which Elizabeth McKenzie had just made up her mind to reclaim, put the whole blessed thing in the cart. "Once aboard the *Galatea*," she thought, drying in the warm air, "and he'll be so glad to be among men that he'll certainly stay the night. For two days he's had the pipe and a yarn look in his eyes that Valentine used to get after his leave at home. Once that comes a woman has to use a megaphone to be heard by and a searchlight to be seen in. Lunch to-morrow? Bosh. With the Captain and the mate and the engineer, the sun on the yacht and no telephone he'll be missing for a week. I know that man! He's only managed to stick to me all this time because Malcolm has had

things to do. I feel as though I had a hole between my eyes from his having gazed clean through my head. I shall thrill with all the ecstasy of a Nun when someone kisses me. It's been the oddest time that *I've* ever spent. These men of one woman. . . . And now what, pray? A postponement and more work, is all I can see. Shiedsteiner will have left his office and the two detectives will have to be headed off. That's all. I shall have to hang about in a taxi until they turn up, take back the latch-key, tell them the performance won't be held owing to the unavoidable absence of the leading man, and potter home to bed. How I *hate* failure. I ought not to have let him out of my sight. A nice expensive bath, this, ye gods! . . . But I must eat, I know that. And I have a longing for caviare. The old hen's probably dining out and I'm doomed to go somewhere alone. Which means a tea shop and paper napkins, a lukewarm chop and the furtive goo-goo's of clubless clerks. Filthy! I wonder if I could get hold of Val and do it decently?"

No sooner thought than acted upon. But no. Major Beamish was out, — was, as a matter of fact, on his way to meet Carol. Luck had turned its fickle back. Wait a minute. How about that widower, Mitchell Burrows, who had sent flowers several times and given her half a dozen mixtures of sentimentality and friskiness on the telephone, — McKenzies' friend, sixty, with a face like that of an overfed Pomeranian, very rich. He would fall over himself to take her out to a tête-à-tête dinner, and as a second string . . . But no. Sooner a tea shop with the evening paper than those round watery eyes and the bronchial chuckle. He was a last resort.

Elizabeth McKenzie's cold shoulder on the way

downstairs, and her telegraphic answer to the usual cheery greetings, sent May on her way to Madison Avenue with the certain knowledge that her economical days and nights were drawing to an end. It never rained but it poured. By Jove, it began to be funny, — so confoundedly funny, in fact, that May took a tiny smile in with her to the “Come Right Inn.” A sense of the ridiculous enables one to revel in the discomfort and misery of others. A sense of humor gives one the faculty of enjoying the frustration of oneself. This rarest of gifts is not born, but acquired after long practice, and is only to be found in the constitutions of Prime Ministers, younger sons, and women who are obliged to earn their livings.

VII

AND at this moment Malcolm handed Beatrix out of her car at the main entrance of the Plaza Hotel.

“Dear old boy,” she said, squeezing his hand and thus conferring upon him the Order of Merit. “And the program is . . .”

“Dine here, if you don’t mind. When I said dinner in Bartlett’s rooms I forgot that there would be no servants there. Or we can go to any one of the numerous places within a stone’s throw, whichever you like.” Too late he felt that he might have laid in a delicatessen meal and picnicked among the nudes. He was a man whose epigrams came to him the morning after he had made his speech

“Here,” she said, to his great relief, “because

there's a band, and I want to hear music to-night." And then she turned to the chauffeur, who was all eyes and ears. (Wiz-wiz-wiz in the kitchen, wiz-wiz-wiz in the garage. He would be full in the limelight in the morning.) "Put the car up until half past twelve and then bring it round to Mr. Franklin's place. Don't be late, please."

From where she stood, so amazingly young and cool and courageous, with the false light of hundreds of electric lamps on her fair hair and wide apart eyes and heart breaking profile, she could see the dirty white building in which she believed that she was presently to string herself up to the great moment of rescue and, as she hoped and prayed, of reconciliation, to kiss again with tears. The sun had gone out of the sky to do its duty by Australia, and the City lay under the slowly failing daylight, soft, melancholy; the coming night anticipated by street globes and car lamps moving like early fire-flies. The conscientious routine of nature had brought forth its pale moon, and one by one its stars came out in the clear sky. A God-sent breeze had rolled away the static heat and was perfuming the streets with the faint odor of flowers. There was a perceptible easing down in the sweep of people, and the charge of traffic; and although the incessant symphony went on it could be detected by a keen ear that many members of the great orchestra had slipped away to rest.

They went through the carpetless foyer and the tea-fight room to the new long dining hall which was sparsely filled with people whose business chained them to the town. The band was playing the wistful music of *Le Coq d'Or* which lifted Malcolm to the place between earth and heaven where the living dead lean

over to catch a sight of former loves and waft the messages that few can hear. They didn't speak until the poignant melody had ceased.

"Ha!" said Beatrix. "I needed that."

"And I," said Malcolm.

He beckoned to the waiter who had respected their desire to listen, the flotsam, perhaps, of one of the broken countries of which America is full, and handed the menu hopelessly to his guest. He never knew what to order to eat, and hardly ever what he ate when it came. And there they sat, enduring the difficult process of killing time, for hours, until two by two the other diners had filtered away, and the band had gone to rest and think of everything but music.

They talked, spasmodically, between the tunes; once or twice about the ordeal which, they had every reason to believe, still faced them; its details, the cleverness and cunning of May, the dirtiness of law; but this they did with that affectation of indifference which the fear of showing fear brought to such perfection in the trenches. They, too, had, presently, to go over the top, and not for a single instant did the needle cease to sew them through and through. If they had had wind of the fact, suddenly, during those trying hours, that their job was scratched, the effort for which they had strung themselves was a wash-out, the reaction would have left them angry, with a sense of having been misused.

And then, at last, they left, the waiter wondering how soon they were going to be divorced; made their way across the street, entered the dirty white house whose days were probably numbered, and were taken up to Bartlett's rooms with still an hour to kill. After Beatrix had looked at picture after picture, "No won-

der your friend Bartlett's afraid of getting married," she said, and chose the window seat in the sitting room.

"Will you have all the lights," asked Malcolm, "or the one here on the table?" He would have preferred them all, being nervous and depressed, but he remembered that Beatrix had moods about lights and waited for her orders.

"All out, old boy," she said, and waved her hand towards the gleaming scene below.

There might have been a carnival in the Park. Not hundreds, but thousands, of small round spots glistened between the leaves in a vast irregular pattern like that of stars. And in the wide fringe of mammoth houses uncountable windows lent their squares of yellow fire. It was fairyland.

"What have you been thinking about all this time?" he asked, drawing up a chair.

"Marriage," she said.

"Oh." And he accepted the fact, which was obvious from her tone, that she had discovered the germ of failure that goes from house to house. He would have accepted more wonderful things than that from her at any time.

"Yes. I used to think that marriage is a very easy thing, Mally, that plays itself. A game of sorts, like Halma, in which a man and woman, being in love enough to play together, move little pegs of temperament one by one, against other little pegs. And sometimes the man wins and sometimes the woman wins, but mostly the woman, because she had the better head for games, and more finesse, and can fake with far more cunning. But it isn't, as all this business has shown. It's not a mere adventure either, but a vocation, a calling by the will of God, in which two people

are in partnership, holding each other's happiness in equal trust. And if both don't agree at once to work for the success of the firm, and not for individual triumphs, there is bankruptcy and dissolution, even if there has been a dividend in the shape of a child. It's mostly up to the woman of the firm to keep the names together because nature has punished her with times of sheer insanity when she loses her hold and slips. And then she's cruel, and queer, and not answerable, and nearly always misunderstood. But there are times when the man is hit by nature too to make things even up, and being just as unnormal, though he hasn't the least idea why, grows melancholy, gets frazzled, and ought to be with men. The golden rule is patience and forbearance and a knowledge of when to be alone. A little rest from each other, a silence, frankly explained, and a joining up, with laughter. Laughter, that's the thing, Mally, and open windows, and frequent spring cleans, and no barriers and mental hidings, everything out in the sun. And when a row is coming, or an argument, like a black cloud in the sky, something that's going to brush the colors from the butterfly's wing and leave however small a mark on happiness which is just as delicate, laughter, quick, as a means of escape, or flattery, which is just as good. And there must be the will to succeed, the daily prayer for unselfishness, the deep down, rooted understanding that marriage is the bestowal of God's grace upon two people to put them in the way of salvation. . . . That's what I've been thinking out, Mally, and that's why I wanted no lights."

"I see," said Malcolm, who knew less about marriage than Bartlett and nothing at all about "Art."

VIII

BUT it was the light in Pelham's bedroom, which our wee friend May caught sight of from the street, that gave Beatrix back her chance to renew her partnership.

May had drifted into the Plaza Theatre after her indecent meal, in the tragic process of killing time that keeps so many of these places open, watched the comic picture without a smile, seen the Mayor at play, the little giants of Genoa in their separate lairs, and marvelled at the pompous inanity of a murdered tale. Then, at half past eleven, cursing the carelessness that allowed the *Galatea* to intervene, had walked into the avenue, waited for the two men who had been in Shiedsteiner's office until a quarter to twelve and just as she was about to tell them that the trick was off . . . "No, by Jove, it isn't." There was the light in Pelham's bedroom window. "Mr. Franklin has come back! Keep the key, tell the elevator man, if he should ask you, that you are friends of mine — I will prepare his mind to see you — and carry out the programme exactly to the minute."

What excuse was she to pull out when she presented herself at the door? It was late to make a call, even for one who had manufactured the semblance of a relationship that made anything possible. She left it to inspiration, which had got her out of many a stagnant moment, darted across the street, into the building, up in the elevator to Pelham's apartment,

dabbed powder on her face and put her finger on the bell.

What to do, what to say, what excuse to make? One, two, three, four, five — perhaps he had left the light burning and was not back after all, — six, seven, eight — what excuse to make, what to do, what to say — Think, you idiot, think . . . nine, ten, eleven . . .

There was annoyance and irritation in the way the door swung back. Pelham, in his dressing gown, with his hair all touzled.

“I’m — I’m ill,” gasped May, with one hand on her heart and the other fluttering.

He caught her as she tottered forward. “Good God,” he said. Her heart was thumping.

“An accident, — just in front of this house. My taxi — crashed. Nothing seemed to be the matter until I . . . I tried to walk. Everything — went round. Like a beacon — the light in your window . . . a friend to help. Oh, oh, Pel!” She crumpled in his arms. It was a masterpiece of fainting.

Picking that little frightened thing up in his arms and shutting the door with his foot, Pelham marched her to his bedroom, didn’t know what the devil to do when he had got her there, and laid her on the crumpled bed from which sleep had backed away. How white her face had gone, how hard her heart was thumping. . . .

“Brandy,” she said. “Pel dear — brandy,” which meant finding the key, opening the closet, ample time for her to picturesque herself for those detectives.

“All right.” He was thankful to be able to do something. If it had been a horse, or a dog, a bird even, hurt, how easy. But a woman. . . .

Off went her thin blue jacket, as Malcolm, crouched on the fire escape, helped Beatrix into the room. Off went the next article of clothing, as Beatrix waved her hand to the man who never had felt less like a poet or more like a man. Off went the hat and down came the hair as Beatrix tiptoed across the dark room and fumbled for the door. Down went that baby head upon the dented pillow and up went the top sheet to her round white shoulders as Pelham dashed out of the sitting room with a glass and a bottle and came face to face with Beatrix in the hall.

What on earth — now Beatrix. Was everybody turning night into day?

“An accident to May,” he said, too worried to ask any questions, or do more than wonder if this were a dream, a nightmare. And in he went to the sufferer with brandy as the two coarse-jowled men in bowlers opened the front door and followed in their stomachs.

Mrs. Valentine Beamish in Mr. Pelham Franklin’s crumpled bed. Mrs. Valentine Beamish with gleaming shoulders and hair in the proper legal disarray. Mr. Pelham Franklin in a dressing gown over pyjamas, a bottle of brandy in hand. Rioting, if you please, and hitting the high spots. Oh, Heavens, in a land universally submissive to dry laws. Could the scene ever have been more perfectly arranged, more utterly conclusive, more strictly legal? “I respectfully submit, your Honor, that the overwhelming evidence, just presented by my client’s detectives, of this man and this woman caught in flagrante delicto . . .”

And then, — and then Beatrix, framed in the open door of the bedroom (Good God, the grey-blue girl!) her dander up, her wits as well in hand as if they had been trained on the tan like a team of thoroughbreds,

seizing her chance with gusto, with a certain savage joy, as cool as a bright October day and as gracious as the Chairwoman of a Civic Club receiving her guests of honor at a luncheon.

“The doctors, of course,” she said. “How splendid of you to have divined this accident. What a wonderful profession it is. But my husband and I, — by the way, I’m Mrs. Pelham Franklin — are looking after our dear little friend and as it’s really nothing serious, — more fright than anything — yes, that’s the door, so kind of you to come. . . . The latch-key? How providential that you should have had a latch-key. What a wonderful profession it is! Oh, yes, there, on the table, in that little tray. *Good-bye*, then. So kind of you to have come.”

An ignominious scuttle. Two coarse jowled men in bowlers, which it hadn’t occurred to them to remove, following two disconcerted stomachs out of the apartment. The bang of the front door.

“How’s that?” asked Beatrix, facing round to our gasping wee friend May.

IX

THERE would have been a moment of silence but that the window was open and the tune of the City, though played by many fewer instruments, rose up to the room.

There was also a ripple of laughter, as the top sheet was pitched back and two high heels made a simul-

taneous click on the floor. "Damned clever," said May. "Your game, my dear. Congrats."

Poor old Pelham, who knew nothing of women and not one blessed thing about girls. "What in God's name is all this?" he asked, bewildered, benumbed, with a glass in one hand, and a bottle in the other, his feet in bedroom slippers, his hair dishevelled, his eyes turning from the icy triumph on the face of Beatrix to the blasphemous amusement on the water-color face of May.

"You can tell the story in more appropriate words than I," said Beatrix, with an odd little bow.

"That I doubt. I give you best in this. But what puzzles me like the dickens is how you got on to the thing. Was I watched? Or perhaps you bribed the Jap. But it doesn't matter. I thought I had been pretty brainy, — that accident was a gorgeous inspiration. I take off my hat to you." As a matter of fact she was standing in front of the dressing table, rolling her hair up, in order to put her hat on. An absurdly tiny thing, in her thin blue skirt and dainty camisole, and gleaming shoulders, with deft quick fingers working on her hair.

"You're kindness itself," said Beatrix. "Is there any higher praise than yours? But all that doesn't answer Pelham's question, does it? I think he has the right to know, don't you?"

"Dear old Pel," said May warmly and heartily. "He really oughtn't to be let out alone in this world. The mistake you made there, Bee dear, — and it was a howling mistake, — I can't imagine how *you* came to blunder, a typical grey-blue girl — I jumped at, and in another second would have done the trick." She made an eloquent gesture towards the shirt or blouse,

or whatever it was, that lay on the floor, treating the whole affair as though it were a slight contretemps to the members of a more than usually affectionate family.

He picked it up and handed it over. "Trick?" he asked. "What trick?"

She gave another ripple: as who should say, "These men who go after beasts, — do they all know as little about women?" "The legal trick," she said, shooting a smile at Beatrix that drew her into the inner ring of first class brains, so very small and select. "A perfectly proper, well-recognized trick. An unhappy wife with a hungry eye to the main chance, desires to become a co-respondent with the ultimate hope of being married again, and so arranges with her unconscious husband's lawyer, employed by herself, to be caught in *flagrante delicto* — with the other unconscious husband. . . . Need I say more?"

If a table hadn't been handy Pelham might have dropped the bottle, — a too expensive accident in these days of triumphant bootlegging.

"And you, dear old thing, were the ultimatum of the scheme, and it seemed to me, in putting two and two together, — I gathered that you were also looking into the simple methods of divorce, although you were very stingy with your confidences — that we could help each other in the matter. I'm at your service still. But, of course, now that you've been rescued, which proves that Beatrix doesn't intend to let you go, you will remain a martyr to the cause of marriage and I shall have to rearrange my plans. Well, it's all in the day of a working girl. It was well worth trying and I'd rather make a colossal failure than nothing at all." She gave her jacket to Pelham who helped her into

it, eyes blazing and mouth in a tight line. "Your wee friend May." Friend! Ye gods.

Then a little powder, quite unnecessary, a touch or so of lip-stick, one last corrective glance in the mirror, one more ripple of laughter and a valedictory wind-up.

"So long, Pel dear. I've bored you badly, but give me credit for playing horse. Do your best to see the humor of things. It saves a lot of trouble. Goodbye, Beatrix. Weep a little, and say you're sorry for whatever it was that drove Pel out. He'll fall, old dear. He's very much the man. And if you possibly can, both of you, stay married. It's an excellent institution as things go, if wangled right, — that jolly house of yours, too, and all the money in the world. I had almost forgotten the baby." She held out her hand to Beatrix, one sportsman to another.

And Beatrix took it, with another odd little bow, and led her out into the hall. She wanted to give Pel the opportunity to get even with himself, dress, and do his hair. A man touzled is at frightful odds, and Pelham's hair was the one smooth thing about him. And there she said, "Goodbye. As it turns out I'm grateful to you for this. I *do* want to stay married. I *did* make a howling mistake. . . . What are you going to do?"

May shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, I have a dream," she said, liking and admiring the grey-blue girl, with her wide-apart eyes, and straight look, and young sweet body. Envyng her, too, most deeply. Pel was an easy man to love. "But I shall have to pay for it with rather more than it's worth. A face like an old Pomeranian's versus fifteenth century tables and an Abbey near the Sussex downs. At any rate,

Val Beamish, who's Elizabethan, will be thankful to play the game his way. So there it is. Good luck."

"Good luck," said Beatrix, standing with her hand up until the elevator had descended with May, the working girl.

That howling mistake, — could it, oh, could it be mended?

Ten minutes later, or less, Pelham found her standing in the middle of the sitting room, facing the door. He had dressed and his hair was smooth. "So that's why you came here," he said.

She nodded. She couldn't find her voice. How she loved, and had longed for this man, who knew nothing of women, and oughtn't to have been let out alone. He was worn, and tired, and had lost his sunburn. There was the most painful look of homesickness in his eyes. It was a damned shame.

"A rescue, she called it."

She nodded again. Oh, God, those lonely nights and days!

"It was done as only you could do it, but was it worth while doing at all? The personal satisfaction of knocking May under the ropes amused you, of course. It would have been the same with me, the other way round, with Greenwood, so suggestive of spring. But it would have unknocked the whole mistake if you'd let it go through . . . and we've got to realize that it *is* a mistake. I'm too old. That's the trouble."

And still she couldn't speak. All the things that she had learned by heart and rehearsed for days, —

the humble confession, the appeal for forgiveness, the outpouring of love, — stopped in her throat. The girl in her, with its impudence and cruelty, anarchy, mischief, and experiments, vague achings and strange tangents had gone, like a fever. She was a poor little woman who had made a mistake, a howling mistake, and had paid for it, and whose gifts of cunning and sex appeal, new honesty and humbleness were all choked by the emotion of primitive desire and homesickness stirred by the sight of this man. . . . “Weep a little. He’ll fall, old dear.” No, no!

And after a wondering, blundering look at this almost unrecognizable, inarticulate, no longer girl but swimming-eyed woman, whose outstretched fingers seemed to send forth agonies to touch, whose loveliness called him, and shook him, and made him forget, poor devil, he cried out, “What do you want me to do, where do you want me to go? I’m damned if I know. Why don’t you *tell* me?”

And at this flinging up of hands to be shot, this abject confession of male subjection and weakness which she could have used in a triumphant renewal of her power to sway and possess, she rose to the best of herself, to the height of that moment, — she went down on her knees at his feet, with her lips, and her tears, on his hand.



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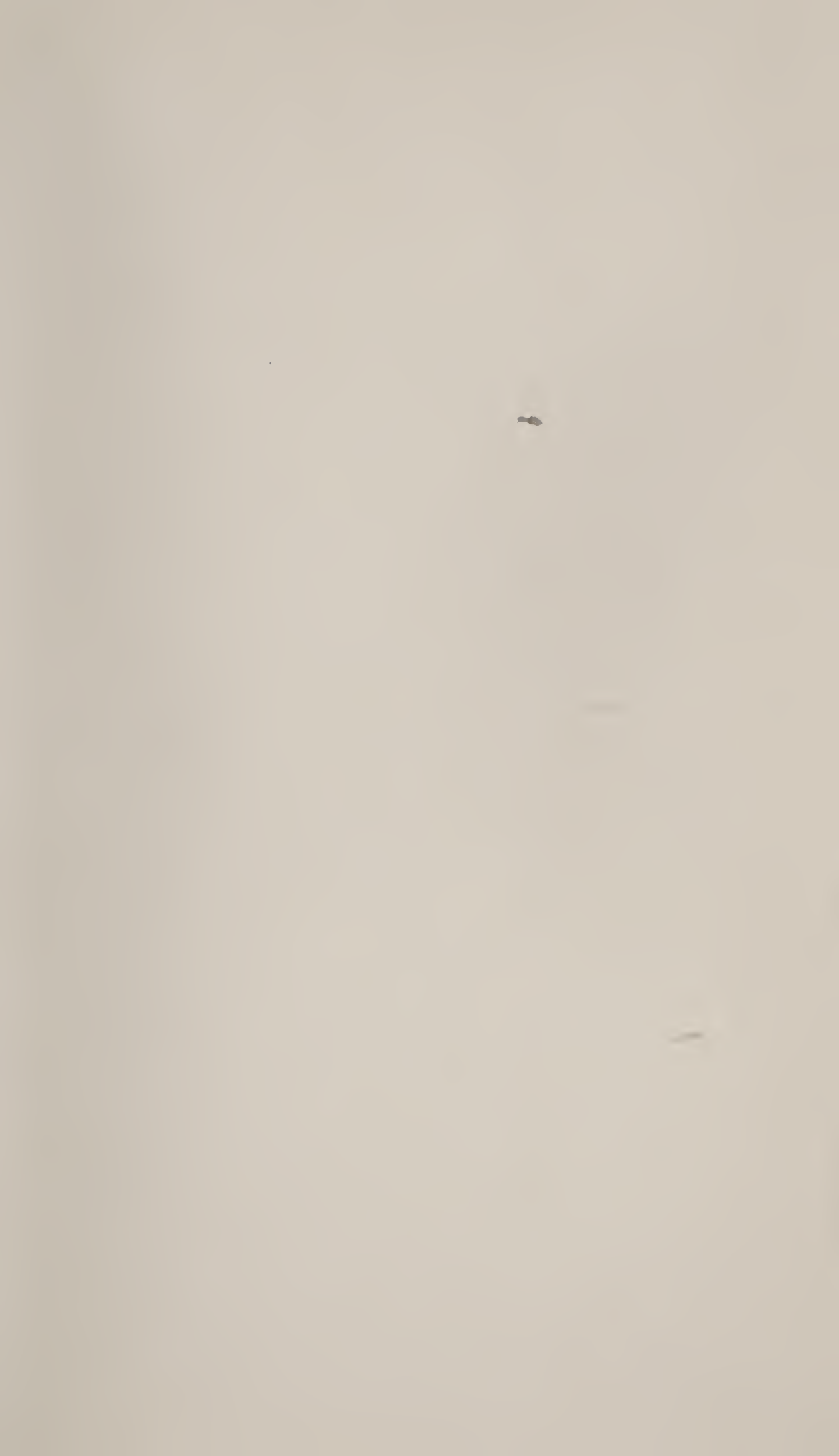
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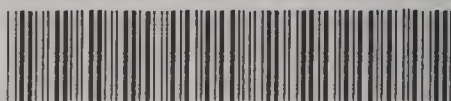
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